

CANCELLED
BONDS



1877



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CANCELLED BONDS.

VOL. II.

CANCELLED BONDS

BY

HENRY CRESSWELL

AUTHOR OF

“A MODERN GREEK HEROINE,” “A WOMAN’S AMBITION,”
“A WILY WIDOW,” “SLIDING SANDS,” ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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WORKS BY HENRY CRESSWELL.

NOVELS.

A MODERN GREEK HEROINE.

FAIR AND FREE.

INCOGNITA.

THE SINS OF THE FATHERS.

THE SURVIVORS.

A WILY WIDOW.

MY LORD OTHELLO.

SLIDING SANDS.

THE HERMITS OF CRIZEBECK.

FAIREST OF THREE.

A WOMAN'S AMBITION.

DISINHERITED.

BROKEN FORTUNES.

A PRECIOUS SCAMP.

DRAMA.

THE CONVERSION OF ENGLAND.

IN DANGER.

(By HENRY CRESSWELL and W. LESTOCQ.)

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CANCELLED BONDS.

CHAPTER I.

UNFORTUNATELY Rosamond had none of Eleanor's ingenious little arts, and would have hesitated about asserting that a path was 'a little *wee* bit shorter,' when she knew that it was a quarter of a mile longer.

So all she had to say was,

'If you want a short cut to the house, mamma, the only one I know is across the bridge.'

Mrs. Peyton was really fatigued, and so

at last, protesting all the time that the bridge was unsafe, she consented to go home by that route.

‘Only remember, Rosamond, that you are never again to take me through the woods by the path which you chose to-day, never! It is too far for me. You must have known that—only you none of you have any consideration for me.’

‘Very good, mamma.’

She abstained from remarking that Mrs. Peyton had herself chosen the path they had taken, and that she had warned her that it would prove rather long.

‘It is no good saying anything to mamma,’ she reflected.

But had Eleanor been in her place she would at once have admitted her mistake.

‘I know, aunty dear. I am so dread-

fully sorry. I ought to have thought. Only, do you know, I fancied that it was not *quite* so far.' Whereupon Mrs. Peyton would have replied,

'Perhaps it is not quite so long as I fancy, dear. I am a little tired to-day. I daresay that is all:' and would have thought, 'what a good, kind, considerate girl,' Eleanor was.

They were not long in reaching the bridge. When they were about to step upon it, Mrs. Peyton stopped abruptly.

'I cannot cross this bridge, Rosamond. It is not safe.'

'I assure you, mamma dear, it is quite safe. Shall I walk across, first and come back to you?'

She stepped forward. Her mother immediately arrested her.

'Stop, Rosamond. I forbid you to cross

that bridge. It is not safe. Cannot you see? Look over there. There is a great piece of the railing broken away. Anyone might fall into the water just there.'

Rosamond looked at the broken railing, a little surprised to discover that it had not yet been repaired. She knew how nearly some one had fallen into the water 'just there.'

'I told you that the bridge was rotten, Rosamond. We must go back after all. It would have been shorter had we turned back at once. When I come out with you, you always get me into some difficulty.'

'Nonsense, mamma: we can cross the bridge well enough. You need not go near that place. If you like, we can keep close to the railings on the other side.'

‘Which is, of course, rotten too. You can see that the railings are all rotten. The whole bridge is rotten. I always said that it was: only no one heeds anything that I say. If the bridge was not altogether rotten, how would a great piece of the railing like that have fallen off of itself into the water?’

‘Who says that it fell off of itself?’ enquired Rosamond, now beginning to be interested.

‘It must have fallen off of itself. Your father was speaking of it the other day. He was the first person who noticed it; and he has been asking everyone if they knew anything about it. He says that no one knows how it was broken, and that shows that it must have fallen of itself.’

‘Did papa ask Eleanor?’ enquired Rosamond.

‘ He has asked everyone.’

‘ No. He did not ask me. Only I did not count, I know. What did Eleanor say ?’

‘ I do not think she said anything. Your father said that she looked surprised, but had no explanation to offer, any more than anyone else.’

Rosamond was thinking,

‘ Ah: I daresay. With all her faults Eleanor is not a tell-tale.’

There she did Eleanor justice. Long years ago Eleanor had learned that one of the first things essential to keeping the peace in the strange home in which she found herself, was silence about many things; and reticence had become a second nature with her. The trait was not one calculated to win the affections of a person of Rosamond’s temperament. Yet,

like all the rest, she too was sometimes compelled to confess that she owed Eleanor a debt of gratitude for her silence.

‘Well, mamma,’ she asked, ‘how are we going to get home? We might cross the bridge one at a time, if you think it will not bear us both. Let me go first. I am heavier than you.’

And she again stepped forward.

‘Stop, Rosamond, stop!’ almost screamed her mother. ‘Do you want me to *see* you drowned?’

Rosamond stopped, but only to say, bitterly, for the scene between herself and Eleanor on the bridge was still before her mental vision,

‘Well, I should not be much loss, should I, mamma?—Or, at any rate, you would not particularly miss me.’

Mrs. Peyton regarded her with a scared look.

‘What do you mean?’ she asked.

‘Nothing particular, mamma. Only that if I were drowned, and Lennox too, for the matter of that, it would be a relief to you to be rid of us. You need not look so scared, mamma. We have turned out a bad bargain, haven’t we?’

Her mother was regarding her with positive consternation.

‘I don’t know what you mean,’ she stammered. ‘You will drive me out of my senses, Rosamond. My poor head is going round and round.’

‘I mean, mamma, that there must be few days in your life which you regret more than the one on which you first set eyes on Lennox and me. That is no secret, is it?’

But Mrs. Peyton, trembling with fright, had put her fingers into her ears.

‘Go! go! leave me!’ she exclaimed at last, rocking herself backwards and forwards. ‘Go. Not over that bridge, but round the other way. And send some one to fetch me home! You and your brother will kill me between you. Go to the house. Go at once. I am afraid of having you anywhere within sight of me. Tell them to send the pony-carriage to fetch me. I could not walk another step. You and your brother will kill me between you.’

‘Am I to leave you here, mamma?’ asked Rosamond. ‘You really mean that?’

‘Yes. Leave me, leave me! Cannot you see that I am afraid of you? Send Mrs. Norton and the pony-carriage to fetch me.’

Rosamond obeyed, and soon disappeared among the trees, walking quickly in the direction of the house.

When she was no longer visible, Mrs. Peyton drew a breath of relief.

Then looking around her she exclaimed, half aloud,

‘Those awful children! Merciful heavens! What does she know! And I dare not speak to her! Those terrible children! They will kill me! I cannot go on with this much longer.—But I have deserved it.’

Rosamond soon reached home. In the hall she found Eleanor just returned from her walk with Lennox.

‘I have upset mamma again, Eleanor,’ she said. ‘She would not walk home with me. She is by the bridge over the deep pool. I am to send Mrs. Norton to her, and the pony-carriage. She says that she cannot walk a step farther. If you

do not mind, I think she would like it if you went to her.'

'I will go at once,' replied Eleanor. 'If you will speak to Mrs. Norton, and see about the pony-carriage.'

When Eleanor had reached the spot where Rosamond had left her mother, she found Mrs. Peyton in tears. She would give Eleanor no account of what had taken place. Eleanor, however, persuaded her to cease weeping before Mrs. Norton appeared and the boy with the pony-carriage. Mrs. Peyton sternly refused to be driven over the bridge, although she had seen the boy come that way with the trap: and upon reaching home went straight to bed.

When Eleanor came later in the evening to enquire after her, Mrs. Peyton would not see her.

'Miss'es won't see anyone, miss,' said

the nurse, in reply to her questions, ‘ and she won’t tell me anything, either. She has had a terrible shock of some sort. She seems quite broken down.’

CHAPTER II.

‘LENNOX, I should like to see Mr. Jaffray.’

So said Rosamond the following morning, coming into the library where Lennox was reading.

‘Then let us ask him to come down here,’ replied Lennox at once.

He asked no questions about the reasons which had prompted Rosamond’s wish. Octavius Jaffray, whom, it may be remembered, he had accidentally met in town the same evening that he had heard the story of Marmaduke’s adventure on

the Thames, was Rosamond's godfather as well as his own, and one of the few people to whom Rosamond would now and then turn for assistance, when more than usually unhappy.

The old gentleman differed in a very important respect from all Mr. Peyton's other acquaintances. He had, from the date of their birth, taken the greatest interest in his god-children, and nothing that had since happened had made a shade of difference in the warm-hearted partiality with which he regarded them. When they were little creatures he came to visit them with his pockets stuffed with presents—toys, sweets, shillings, and half-crowns; all the things by which children are delighted: and his appearance was, naturally, always a signal for the most uproarious rejoicings. He would also tell them

tales, or would listen, if they preferred it, to their prattle. He had no objection to assisting at the beheading of Charles the First in the wood-house, and taught Lennox how to fly his kite, and to reel off the cocoons of his silk-worms. Afterwards as the children grew older, and began to find themselves neglected, the difference in their parents' behaviour to them produced no corresponding change in Octavius Jaffray, who still remained their fast ally. When Eleanor's talents and charms began to win all the world, and Rosamond emerged from childhood into an ill-educated and unpopular young lady, Mr. Jaffray still remained faithful to his old favourites. His first question was always, 'How are the boy and girl?' and it was plain that he regarded them as the only young people in the house of any importance. His be-

haviour to Eleanor was at all times faultless, but he gave no indications at all of being personally interested in her. Nor could that be thought singular. She was not his godchild like Lennox and Rosamond.

Later still, Lennox and Rosamond became aware of a great adroitness in the old fellow's behaviour to all the members of the household. He had realised, long before their young minds suspected it, that his own opinions and those of the head of the family differed widely, and it was by no common cleverness that the old man managed fully to retain the high esteem in which Mr. Peyton held him, whilst still continuing to be on the side of the children in the family dissensions. He seldom openly espoused their cause. He left the unaltered goodwill that he bore them rather to be understood than

expressed, and limited himself to taking a great deal of notice of them, and to encouraging them to talk confidentially to him whensoever he happened to visit their father and mother.

Mr. Peyton, whilst himself giving evidence of being hopelessly disappointed in his children, seemed to accept as natural the old man's retention of his partiality for them. Perhaps he regarded it partly as a compliment to himself, and partly as a commonplace instance of a childless man's fancy for some other man's offspring. It is another question whether there existed any sufficient explanation of the warm interest the old man appeared to have in the young people's welfare. One of the peculiarities of Mr. Peyton's family was, that adequate explanations of the things which took place amongst them never appeared to be forthcoming.

The old man had a home in Leicester, where he could seldom be found. A man in easy circumstances, and of some scientific eminence in his own circle, he was generally either travelling or wandering about the country in pursuit of some object or another connected with his own hobbies and occupations. For the rest, a genial old fellow, affecting an odd fatalism of his own invention, and possessed of a knack of bringing smiles into the faces of all who met him.

‘Only how shall we get Mr. Jaffray down here, without his appearance seeming strange to papa?’ suggested Rosamond.

‘Nothing is easier. You know how he is always poking about all over the country in pursuit of his scientific researches. There is not a corner of England that he

does not visit. And, were he anywhere near here, he would be certain to look us up. He spoke, when I met him in town, of being possibly in this part of the world.'

'Yes, write to him, Lennox,' said Rosamond. 'I wish he would come down here. He would see how badly we are all getting on.'

'I will write at once,' said Lennox, crossing to the table.

Two days later at dinner, Mr. Peyton observed,

'I had a letter by the afternoon post from Jaffray. He is going into Cornwall next week, and will very likely look us up on his way. I have written to ask him to spend a day or two with us if he can.'

Afterwards another letter came accepting the invitation, and then, one afternoon,

shortly after luncheon, the old man (who was not expected till a much later train, which Lennox was to meet) appeared when there was no one at home but Mrs. Peyton.

He had come on that morning from Exeter, and walked from the railway-station to Belmont, leaving his luggage to be sent after him.

When Rosamond returned from one of her solitary rambles about five, she found him talking to Mrs. Peyton, seated among many pillows, in a lounging-chair in the verandah.

The moment Mrs. Peyton was informed of his arrival, she exerted herself to come downstairs to see him; regarding as a piece of unusual good fortune this opportunity of letting him hear her own version of all her woes before anyone else got hold of him.

Though she had him to herself for two hours, she had not yet reached the history of Rosamond's last escapade, when the young lady herself appeared, coming across the lawn, and the old man left her mother for a moment to go and meet her.

He took both her hands, retaining them whilst he gave her a smacking kiss on both cheeks, and stood regarding her with approval.

‘Why, lassie, you grow handsomer every time I see you!’

Having satisfied his eyes with regarding Rosamond, who thoroughly enjoyed his admiration, he drew her arm within his affectionately, and so turned back with her towards the spot where her mother was sitting.

‘So you have got mamma downstairs, I see, already,’ said Rosamond.

‘We are exchanging our little confi-

fidences,' explained Mr. Jaffray, playfully. 'And what have you been doing since we last met? Been a better girl this time: eh?'

'Very much the contrary. You will hear all about it.'

They were approaching Mrs. Peyton, and Mr. Jaffray, therefore, did not pursue the subject further. Rosamond remained with him and her mother a few minutes only, and then went to change her walking-things, leaving the old gentleman and Mrs. Peyton to those 'little confidences' of which he had spoken.

Whenever Octavius Jaffray paid them a visit every member of the household in turn secured him for a *tête-à-tête* exchange of 'little confidences' such as Mrs. Peyton was at present enjoying. By tacit agreement they had also fallen into a way of respecting each other's opportunities of

confidential conversation with the old gentleman—unhappy families form habits of this kind. Mr. Peyton kept at a distance whilst his wife was pouring her troubles into Mr. Jaffray's ears. Lennox never intruded upon his father's moments of private consultation with his old friend. Even Rosamond's walks with her godfather were regarded as privileged and not to be interrupted. By the time that he had been with them forty-eight hours, he had heard at least four different versions of everything that had taken place since his last visit, if not five—for Eleanor also often had things to say to him. In consequence he was better informed of all that was going on in the house than any of its inmates.

That evening, the whole party dined together, for the first time since they had been at Belmont. Later, when Mrs. Peyton had retired, Mr. Jaffray joined Lennox in the

library, where the latter often sat up reading long after the rest of the family were asleep.

The following morning, Lennox having to go to Plymouth, Mr. Peyton being about to drive with Eleanor, and Mrs. Peyton too much exhausted by the emotions of the previous evening to be likely to be visible all day, Mr. Jaffray proposed to Rosamond that she should accompany him on a little stroll and introduce him to the grounds of Belmont.

They took one of the lower paths that wound beside the brook which purled in the narrowing valley, and washed the feet of the crags whereof the 'Eagles' Nest' was the tallest.

It appeared at first that Rosamond had little to say. That, Octavius Jaffray observed, became more and more the case on each successive visit he paid her. Six or seven

years since, she had been almost as voluble as her mother, and had always a thousand things to tell him, sore personal grievances connected with almost everything that had happened since they last met, bitter complaints respecting the manner in which she was daily snubbed, and a terrible need of some one who would listen to the passionate expression of her jealous resentment of her parents' preference for her cousin. Only, as she grew older, either she tired of telling how cruelly she was used ; or some sense of personal dignity, developing itself with her young womanhood, made her too proud to speak of her wrongs.

Octavius Jaffray regretted it. There was no one at Belmont about whose thoughts and feelings he was more desirous to be fully informed than about Rosamond's.

‘ We seem to be merely more uncomfort-

able and unhappy here than we were at home,' was her first remark.

Mr. Jaffray had heard that also from Mrs. Peyton, and from Lennox, who had had a good deal to say on the subject.

'I am sorry to hear it, my dear,' he replied. 'Only such things will happen. Sometimes we are happier, and sometimes less happy ; just as our destinies may be. Remember that, and you will not distress yourself about the inevitable.'

'Is everything inevitable?' asked Rosamond.

'Everything—that happens.'

Perhaps Rosamond required time to reflect upon that assertion, though she had heard it from Mr. Jaffray's lips before. A minute or two she remained silent. Then she said, a little abruptly,

'I have something to tell you—something horrible.'

‘ I am all attention.’

Their way ran now by the brook. Gently winding beside the path, under the shadows of the trees, the merry stream, fringed with rushes and sedges and flowering reeds (gay in the sunshine with brightest greens), presented a picture of light and shade fascinating enough to charm the melancholy from out of the heaviest human heart, if it were possible for nature to silence the yearnings of man. Where the water gathered in pools the light breath that stole over it, too faint to merit the name of a breeze, scarcely sufficed to stir the sleeping reflections, whilst amidst the stillness, the chatter of the water over the weirs, the chirrup of the birds, and the occasional evidence of the busy employment of the humble denizens of the woods, filled the green leafiness of the spot with a music of joyous life. Here a butterfly

roamed aimlessly, there a bird enjoyed its morning bath. The droning bees passed diligently from flower to flower, and now and then a water-vole plunged hastily into the stream. Meanwhile, as the two slowly threaded their way under the trees, the young girl made her confession—keeping nothing back—to the old man who listened in silence.

‘I wished you to know,’ she said at the end, ‘I have told no one else. And none of them have the slightest suspicion of what took place, except, of course, Eleanor. She has not spoken. I will give her her due. She is not a tell-tale. And I meant to say nothing about it to anyone. But the thing haunts me. It was an awkward adventure, was it not? No one could be more horrified than I myself. When I think of what I did, I am positively afraid of myself. I hate Eleanor so! And I

cannot help thinking of what I might do—any day—if that terrible impulse came upon me again. I have had thoughts before—and wishes. I do not believe that any girl could help having them who had been supplanted and humiliated as I have been. But a deed like that! If I were not too proud, I could sit down and cry to think that I should have been capable of it. The disgrace it would have been to my father and mother and brother, is alone something too terrible to reflect upon. Only—if that impulse came again! I ought I suppose to put away every such thought from me. Somehow, I cannot. If I were happy: if I could only be happy I would forget Eleanor and all that I have suffered in consequence of her coming to live with us. But I am wretched, Mr. Jaffray: and I brood over things: I cannot help it. Then my rancour is stirred,

and—and I am frightened when I think of what might ensue in a moment. I avoid being with Eleanor as much as I can. If you can help me, do so for pity's sake: for indeed I am afraid of myself.'

She had stopped, and turned to face him looking at him with appealing eyes.

The old man gently took her arm and led her on, silently.

'That happened in an instant?' he asked, after a minute or two.

'In an instant. A moment before I was thinking of nothing of the kind. And the next moment I was doing it.'

'Fate, my dear, fate.'

'Why should that be my fate?'

'Because the fates are three frousy old harridans: as you would know if you had studied mythology. They are deserving of everyone's profoundest contempt. Still

there they are. Or, if you prefer my putting it in a modern fashion—not that the modern explanation is one atom more true or more satisfactory than the ancient one—we are all of us born with certain dispositions, and must take the consequences.’

‘You believe in what Lennox calls heredity?’

‘Believe in heredity! Of course I do. Do you believe that poppy seeds will grow up into poppies, or lettuce seeds into lettuces? Did you ever see pears growing on an oak tree, or a hen that laid kittens? Every one believes in heredity—and heredity is fate. That is just it.’

‘Then whence do I inherit my passionate nature? Papa is not passionate, nor mamma.’

‘Perhaps you will not be so when you

are their age. Or, if a disposition were a combination of two very different dispositions, might it not be unlike both of them?’

‘I am sure I do not know,’ replied the girl. ‘That is an explanation like one of Lennox’s, more difficult to understand than what he is explaining: when things are like that, one might just as well spare oneself the trouble of thinking about them, it seems to me.’

‘Quite as well. Don’t think. Thinking will not alter things.’

‘And suppose I do some day push Eleanor into the pond?’

‘You will not do that unless it is your destiny. And if it be your destiny thinking will not keep you from doing it.’

‘I should not be tempted to do it if I were happy. All I want is not to be miserable: to be like other girls are:

happy sometimes, at least; and not to be snubbed, not unpopular, not hated, not feared,—not afraid of myself. If I could but see a little happiness waiting for me somewhere. If I had any future before me !’

‘But there is always a future, my girl ! And what is more, it always brings changes. Those three old harridans have to spin on. That is their doom. Some day they will rid you of your cousin : most probably get her married, for instance.’

‘That will make no difference. She will marry Lennox. It is a good thing that she is going to marry him. Otherwise papa would disinherit us both, to give her everything. But the marriage will make no difference. Papa will never agree to Eleanor’s going away from him. Lennox will live at home with her and papa : and we shall still be all together.

The only future I can see is a repetition of the past.'

'No, my dear. The past never comes back,' said the old man, gently. 'If it did—by and by, when you are older, you will know that it cannot. The future will be—what it will be. If it is better—you will have been making yourself unhappy about it for nothing. If it is worse—be happy now, when you are not so badly off as you will be then.'

'It cannot be worse.'

'And it cannot be the same : so it must be better. But leave it to destiny, my girl. Thinking cannot change destiny. Wait and see ; and never distress your soul about anything.'

'I know that what you say you mean kindly,' conceded Rosamond.

'Ah, but that is not it, my girl. What I say is *true*. Destiny cannot be altered :

so, if you are wise, let it slide. When the fates give you what you do not like, call them bad names if that affords you any relief—hags, jades, hussies, or anything else you please. Only do not distress yourself about what cannot be altered. If anything goes wrong it is their fault, not yours.’

‘A convenient view.’

‘And a useful one ; that will save you from three very bad things : distressing yourself with questions that you cannot answer ; brooding over the past ; and being alarmed about the future. So take the advice of an old man who likes you—and think no more about that bridge.’

‘Only I should like to discover from which of my progenitors I inherit my temper,’ remarked Rosamond. ‘Whosoever it was, I owe that ancestor a grudge.’

There was something so characteristic

in the last sentence that Octavius Jaffray smiled.

‘Were I you,’ he said, ‘I do not think I would give myself the trouble of discovering that ancestor. You already have a good many grudges against one person or another, you see. And the culpable ancestor may as well be left in peace in his or her grave.—But now we will talk no more about that. Have you nothing else to tell me?’

‘Only some incidents to be referred to the spite of the three maiden ladies whom you so often mention. I think they too will be best forgotten.’

After that they walked some distance in silence. Then Mr. Jaffray suggested,

‘My dear, do you think that you would be happier if you were less at home?’

‘I should be happier anywhere where Eleanor was not.’

‘Then we must think about that.’

‘What is the good of thinking if the fates are to decide?’ inquired Rosamond, mischievously.

But the old man only laughed.

CHAPTER III.

‘ You spend to-morrow with us, Jaffray, do you not?’ enquired Mr. Peyton that evening after dinner, as the door closed behind the departing girls.

They were alone. Lennox had not yet returned from Plymouth.

‘ If you please. I want in the morning to pay a visit to those old lime-stone quarries on the road to the moor. How far is it from here—ten miles? I hear that since the working of the quarries has been resumed they have had some won-

derful finds of trilobites, and I want to secure some of them. The coach will take me part of the way, and I shall walk the rest.'

'Will you not let me drive you over?'

'Thanks, very much: but I think not. I would rather potter along, and look at the ground as I go. I went over it all some years ago: and I shall enjoy re-examining some of it very minutely. Do not expect to see me before dinner.'

'Well, as you will. Only if you change your mind there is a trap at your service. Either Lennox or I shall be very pleased to drive you, and to pull up as often as you like.'

Mr. Peyton refilled his glass. Everyone else in the house having taken private counsel with Mr. Jaffray, his turn to do so had come. Passing the decanter, he began in a tone that was slightly confidential,

‘As we are alone, Jaffray, there are one or two things I should like to ask you. Tell me what you think of Mrs. Peyton’s health. Speak quite frankly. I want to know your real opinion.’

His voice was perfectly even and calm, not at all that of a man concerned about his wife’s health.

Octavius Jaffray remarked it. How different the case had been years ago, when, some time after the birth of the children, Mr. Peyton first spoke to him, with the greatest anxiety, of the singular nervousness that seemed to have taken possession of his wife since her confinement.

When Octavius Jaffray first heard that nervousness mentioned, he wondered what the end would be. Now they were very near the end.

Only, under any circumstances, it is

difficult to say to a man, 'Your wife is dying.'

'I am afraid that the change of scene has effected little good,' he said, by way of commencement.

'None. At first the novelty of fresh scenes amused her a little. But for a few days only. After that she began to complain of the change; to say that she had been more comfortable at home. You think her weaker, do you not?'

'I see a great change—a very great change. The vital forces seem to me to be running down. The autumn is often trying to her; and should it again prove so——'

He paused.

'So soon? I daresay you are right. The alteration would be more apparent to you than to us who see her every day. Poor woman! I cannot help thinking that

it will be a happy release. All these years the whole thing has been the profoundest misery. The ailment has been called "Nervous debility;" "Great nervous debility;" "Complications of nervous debility with affection of the heart;" "An obscure neurosis;" "Neurotic affection of the heart:" a mere jugglery of words, without our advancing a step nearer any tangible facts. That is all that we have been able—perhaps I should say *I* have been able—to elicit. If she dies, Jaffray, that will make a great difference in my household.'

His lips closed in a stony silence, as on so many previous occasions, when he had seemed just about to speak of something that lay heavily on his mind.

Only, noticing his guest looking at him, he said, with a shade of melancholy,

'I am obliged to you, Jaffray, for speak-

ing plainly. I know it was difficult to do so. I fear that your apprehensions are too well founded. At the same time—when the causes of an indisposition are so obscure there may be scarcely more reason for disquietude at one time than at another. Perhaps you have seen Mrs. Peyton under somewhat unfavourable circumstances. Little things upset her.—Will you take a cigar?’

‘If you please.’

‘By the way,’ said Mr. Jaffray, lighting his weed, ‘I wanted to talk to you about Rosamond. I don’t know whether being her god-father authorises me to offer a suggestion.’

‘Any helpful suggestion respecting what should be done with her will be welcomed from whomsoever it comes, I should imagine,’ replied Mr. Peyton, speaking rather as if the subject were no concern of his.

‘The girl is unhappy. That is the truth. You know she has always been a favourite of mine. And I think I understand her a little. Why do you not get her married, Peyton?’

A minute Mr. Peyton thought, and then, looking up, said, in his cold, even voice,

‘That is the most sensible suggestion respecting what should be done with her that I have heard made for a good many years, Jaffray. I believe you are right. Marriage would make all the difference in the world in her. Only, you see,’ he continued, ‘there are some difficulties. I mean, for instance, her mother’s ill health, the mammas bring these things about. And—that is not all.’

‘By no means. Her cousin outshines her. When they are together, Rosamond is altogether at a disadvantage. And the fact that she is aware of it prevents her

from making the best of herself. Only, there is no reason why the two girls should be always together. You have many friends; and Mrs. Peyton's health might well excuse your asking one or another of them to help you to find the girl a husband. You would not be the first father who found it expedient to marry a girl of three-and-twenty. She is herself a good-looking lass. You would, I suppose, give her something, and, if you were not too exigent, she might easily enough find some young fellow who would make her contented. Try it, Peyton.'

'I believe you are right. You know, Jaffray, I wish to behave justly to the young people, to her, and to her brother too. I am very anxious to be just to them.'

His voice was that of an anxious man, and also that of one instinctively just.

But it still remained cold, and the shadow of care on his forehead had deepened ; as though to be just to his son and daughter was some heavy and formidable task.

Yet, when he and Octavius Jaffray rose from the table to go to the drawing-room, he said,

‘ I shall think of this, Jaffray. I believe you are right. I shall be glad if I can get the girl married.’

In the drawing-room they found only Eleanor and Mrs. Peyton, the latter looking very tired, sitting together at one end of the long double room, the more distant parts of which, beyond a pair of half-open folding doors, were but dimly lighted. Lennox had returned a few minutes before, and he and his sister had gone out into the verandah to look at the moonlight. Mr. Jaffray proceeded in search of them.

After passing the folding doors, he found himself comparatively in the dark. But a little distance beyond him one of the windows opening on the verandah was wide open. Through it he could see outside, standing in the bright moonlight, the brother and sister, side by side, Lennox's pensive, melancholy face and dark eyes raised to the sky, and Rosamond, a graceful slight figure in her evening dress, looking in the same direction.

As he stood for a moment regarding them, Mr. Peyton came to his side.

‘We were talking of those two just now, Jaffray,’ he said, dropping his voice. ‘Look at them. Look at both of them. Whom are they like? No one that I have ever seen, nor any family portrait that we possess. There is not a trait of either my family or their mother’s family

in either of their faces, nor in their dispositions.'

'Nor are they like each other,' replied Mr. Jaffray.

'Yes, they are. Look at his eyes and hers. Look at his hands and hers. They were much more alike, too, when they were younger; before his long illness. But there is not a trace of their mother nor of me in either of them. Strange—is it not?'

'Such things happen,' replied Mr. Jaffray. 'Results of chance, of causes unknown to us; of destiny, or whatsoever else you like to call it.'

The young people turned round, came in, and stepped forward to speak to him.

He scarcely knew what they said, and replied, to their surprise, in some confused way, which betrayed his preoccupation.

What Mr. Peyton had said to him a moment before had taken away his breath. Simple as it might appear, the remark had startled him, like an unanticipated thunderclap, or a vision of the ground opening suddenly beneath his feet. For years he had been anticipating some observation of that kind from Mr. Peyton. But, as the years rolled on, Mr. Peyton had never made it; and now it came, after all, as a startling surprise. Octavius Jaffray knew all that it implied, and the gravity of the consequences that might be lurking behind it. He was asking himself,

‘How long has Peyton had that remark trembling on his lips? Well, he has said it now.’

When the old gentleman reached the solitude of his own chamber later in the evening, he said to himself,

‘So Peyton has spoken at last. There is going to be a great change here. I *must* go and see Mrs. Chevalier.’

CHAPTER IV.

MR. PEYTON would have been considerably surprised had he seen Octavius Jaffray, the following afternoon, taking the little frequented route which led to the Wold.

At about half-past four the eccentric and amiable old gentleman had already climbed a long way up the steep road which, winding round the isolated hill, in a spiral led to the solitary house at the top. It is true that here and there, where the yellow sand of which the hill was composed appeared, in the steeper banks

by the road side, he occasionally stopped to poke it with the end of his walking-stick, and to examine the morsel of broken fossil that fell out. But it did not appear that any scientific aims had prompted this excursion in the direction of Wold, for the sake of making which he had quitted the lime-stone quarries, with a goodly store of the coveted trilobites in his pocket, shortly after two o'clock. On the contrary, such attention as he bestowed in passing upon the geological formation of the hill was of a desultory kind, whilst he occasionally consulted his watch, as if desirous of reaching a certain point at some fixed hour.

As the route rose above the level of the cultivated land, and entered the woods that encompassed the crown of the hill, the road became much worse, having evidently long suffered from neglect and

want of repair. The water, that in rainy weather ran down its steep descent in torrents, had cut it into deep ruts, and loosened many of the stones. In some places the ditches by the road-side were choked, in others the banks had fallen into the road. Coarse grasses and hardy wild plants, the dock with its tawny red blossoms, the purple hard-head, and, here and there, a little scarlet poppy whose flower shone like a flame against the brown road, grew in the ruts and amidst the stones. To judge by the tracks, nothing ever came this way except some heavy cart; and that but seldom, for here and there a long bramble, stretching almost from side to side, gave evidence of how few were the wayfarers on the deserted route. At other places by the road-side lay the bleached and rotten trunks of fallen trees. The road was just such an

one as leads nowhither, and anyone unacquainted with it might well have expected to see it lose itself among the trees.

But it wound steadily onwards and upwards, with nothing visible on the right or the left but the trees, and above only a strip of blue between them, corresponding with the winding of the way.

The banks presently grew higher, and then again the road emerged from them at a spot where there was an opening amongst the trees, and a gate. From the gate a wide landscape was visible up the valley and down it, and right across it over ranges of hills into a grey distance. The view was celebrated, and lovers of scenery at times came so far up the hill as this gate to feast their eyes on it. A better view of the same scenery was to be had from the grounds of Wold, and one wider

and more magnificent even than that from the upper windows of the house itself: or rather those views had once existed before the trees had shut out everything. But as the trees had shut out everything, and access to the grounds was no longer to be had, the lovers of landscape had now to content themselves with the view from this gate.

Octavius Jaffray paused for a minute only, rather to take breath than because the prospect commanded his admiration. As he proceeded, the road plunged once more amongst the trees, amidst which a stone wall next appeared, and a gateway in it, betwixt the tall, grey gate-posts. Stone creatures, that once upon a time represented lions, perhaps, or perhaps bears, but had now long since become weather-beaten into shapelessness, surmounted the

gate-posts, and supported escutcheons which time had entirely effaced. The iron gates were locked. Beside a closed wicket, that flanked them on one side, was a lodge. The whole had a lonely, desolate air. Octavius Jaffray rang and waited.

A woman appeared, wiping her hands upon her apron. On seeing him, she said, with a smile,

‘ Good afternoon, sir. I’ll fetch the key, sir.’

Vanishing into the lodge, she reappeared in less than a minute, and slowly unlocked the gate, whilst he enquired after her husband.

Within the gates the road was in somewhat better condition. It still swept on in a spiral, ascending with tall trees on either side, but it was already less steep. Then the trees came to an end, and the rest of the route was between

shrubberies of rhododendron and lawns. Only the lawns were almost all neglected, railed in by iron fencing, and turned into grass for sheep. Where a path branched from the road into the shrubbery it was green with a growth of velvet moss that covered it like a carpet.

Passing it, Octavius Jaffray still fared on as if familiar with his way. A little farther, and the road became level, and then with a turn brought him in view of the house.

An Elizabethan house, of grey stone, three storeys high, a fine specimen of the architecture of its date. The building consisted of a central body from which two wings projected forwards on the right and the left, so that the whole surrounded three sides of a square. The central façade was exceedingly handsome, tall and stately, the grey walls crowned with high

gables, and broken by successive finely-proportioned bays that ran up from the ground-floor to the third storey with deeply mullioned windows of many lights. Similar bays appeared in front on each of the wings, one on each wing. But on the sides of the wings, whether those that faced each other, or those that formed the long side walls of the house, the lights were of a simpler design, plain but artistically proportioned ranges of mullioned windows that gave these parts of the house a symmetrical repose. The entrance, a large porch in the centre between the wings, projected from the main body, and the rooms above it, carried up one single storey higher than the rest of the house, made a kind of tower. Whosoever the architect was who planned the place, he must have possessed in a high degree that gift of inventing magical proportions some-

how lost in the modern architecture, which, whilst producing marvels of design and ornament, never manages to give any building a soul. The combined strength and softness, and the living beauty of the whole of this old house were fascinating. It must have been a grand work of art, on the day when its builder finished it. Only when man does his best, Nature, as if pleased with her pupil, adds a touch of her own ; and since then, the passing of three hundred years, with their cloud and sunshine, and wind and rain, had touched the fine old pile with deeply-harmonious colouring, had wrought with magic fingers on the surface of the stone, to give that last finish that hammer and chisel could not, had softened the mouldings, had mellowed all the lines, and had breathed on the brave old house the unique spell of antiquity.

‘Beautiful! beautiful!’ said Octavius Jaffray to himself, as he walked towards the house. He was never able to approach it without bestowing his admiration on it. ‘And to think of the things that were done there! To think that it is the home of one of the saddest of women. There is nothing so strange as destiny!’

He had reached the door, and rang. A minute or two would elapse, he knew, before anyone came to answer, and he spent them in looking around him.

A complete ring of trees, and the sky above—nothing else visible. Every year the trees grew taller and denser. A pity that this little island of existence in the midst of them was not laid out as it deserved—no flower-beds anywhere, and all the lawns, save one little scrap, surrendered to the sheep.

But the door opened, and an elderly

dame in black, wearing spectacles and a mob cap, appeared.

A smile lit her face at once. Wheresoever Octavius Jaffray went, the faces he met lit up somehow with smiles.

‘You, sir!’ she said, with surprise. ‘Come in, sir.’

The old man entered.

‘The rector is with Mrs. Chevalier, sir, in the boudoir,’ said the dame, speaking low, as she closed the door.

‘In the boudoir. That is right. He would not see me come up the road. But he has altered his day for calling on Mrs. Chevalier then?’

‘Since last month, sir. You will wait, sir? Mrs. Chevalier would not like you to leave without seeing her.’

‘No. I want to see her. I’ll wait.’

The woman led the way across the wide hall, with the polished-oak boards, dark-

panelled walls, and heavy oak rafters, to the drawing-room.

‘ I’ll let you know, sir, when the rector leaves,’ she said, and departed, closing the door behind her noiselessly.

The room into which Octavius Jaffray had been shown would certainly have arrested the attention of a stranger. Its unusual proportions of considerable length and width, with a low pitch, caught the eye and pleased it by some old-fashioned homely charm, whilst its soft light was mellowed not only by the darkly-gleaming floor, ink-black wainscoting, and deep plush curtains, but also by the green festooning of leaves about many of the windows, set at places with circlets of coloured glass. The furniture was almost all of oak, of a date approaching that of the house, or harmonising well with it, and the ornaments such as formed a suitable accom-

paniment to the old room and its furniture—brilliant Oriental china of large size, old *bric-à-brac* from Holland and Italy; bronzes, enamels, all rare, and mostly of a rather severe beauty. There were a few pictures on the walls, but of these some were of historic interest, though so many years had elapsed since anyone had been privileged with a view of them.

Disregarding them all as if familiar with them, Octavius Jaffray crossed the room to one of the leaf-shaded windows, where a little lattice stood open, and, leaning his elbows on the sill, regarded the view before him: a strip of emerald lawn ran along the wall of the house, a path, and another lawn that reached to a sunk fence, beyond which the sheep were grazing, and beyond them the all-encircling trees. The spot on the side of the house invisible from the road was less neglected than the rest of the

grounds, but wore, nevertheless, some lonely, desolate appearance.

‘Some weighty crime that heaven could not pardon,
A secret curse on that old building hung,
And its deserted garden.’

‘Lucky that I did not come either earlier or later,’ he said to himself. ‘It would have been awkward had I overtaken the rector, good man, on his way to pay his weekly visit to this desolate home, or met him returning. I wish Peyton had chosen any other neighbourhood. With all the West of England to choose from, that he should have selected a house not five miles from this. But—it was fated!’

All around, the stillness was extraordinary. The merest rustle of a leaf was audible, in this silence unstirred by any sound of human life.

Somewhere a bell rang. He could hear it distinctly though it was in a part of the

house belonging to the domestics. Then steps were audible in the hall. Octavius Jaffray crossed to another window that commanded a view of the drive before the house, and placed himself in a position where he could not be seen.

A clerical figure appeared departing from the house.

But some minutes elapsed before the housekeeper returned to say,

‘The rector has left, sir, and Mrs. Chevalier will see you, if you will please go up into the boudoir.’

Octavius Jaffray quitted the drawing-room and proceeded up the wide shallow stairs without anyone to guide him. Having arrived on the first floor, he passed through an open door that gave access to a sort of vestibule within which several doors opened on different apartments. Stopping before one of the doors he knocked.

The tinkling of a little bell replied. Opening the door he passed in.

The room which he had entered was not large, and might have been bright, for it was lighted by a long window of some seven or eight tall lights divided by stone mullions. But, like many other rooms of the old house, it was panelled to the ceiling with oak that had become black with age, and its dark furniture and heavy curtains filled it with shadows. Like the drawing-room, it was choicely furnished. A handsomely carved Chinese screen stood near the door, against the walls were high-backed chairs, and cabinets of foreign workmanship of great excellence ; in the centre of the room stood an oblong table of polished oak, with spiral legs. On the tops of the cabinets were some few pieces of old china, mostly gigantic punch-bowls, otherwise the room was without ornament

—the hearth furnished with dogs had no mantel above it—save that one or two small portraits hung, in indifferent lights, upon the bare, black panelled walls.

Though the afternoon was warm and the windows open, a small fire of wood burned low upon the hearth. Near it, in a deep high-backed arm-chair, sat an old woman dressed in black satin, and wearing a widow's cap. A China crape shawl covered her shoulders, and about her neck were neatly wrapped some soft folds of white muslin, fastened in front by an oval brooch of dark hair set round with brilliants. By her side, on a small table, were a china tea-service and a silver hand-bell.

As Octavius Jaffray approached she rose, slowly lifting herself from the chair, and advancing a step to meet him.

A tall woman, very thin, with little hair left, and that perfectly white. Her wasted,

almost colourless face long and narrow, a cold, stony face, only expressibly sad, infinitely weary, her mouth, with in-drawn lips, a mere line. But her black eyes, though sunken, were still full of life, of vigour and determination.

‘I did not expect a visit from you, Octavius,’ she said, giving Octavius her long thin hand that lay in his light as a feather and cold as a stone, whilst the corners of her hard lips moved faintly, bringing to her face what might have been called the sad shadow of a smile.

‘No. I came because I had things of importance to tell you. I did not know that the rector had changed his day, or I should not have risked meeting him—more particularly now that the Peytons are in the neighbourhood. But—before we talk of other things—tell me about yourself. Your health continues good?’

They had sat down. Octavius Jaffray near the central table, and the old lady in her arm-chair by the hearth.

‘There is nothing to tell,’ she replied, gently. ‘The health which I have all my life enjoyed continues unimpaired ; time is still granted me to learn to forgive, and to be resigned.’

‘To forgive and to be resigned.’ That was the phrase often upon Mrs. Chevalier’s lips. How difficult it might be for her to learn to be resigned Octavius Jaffray had always understood. But what she desired to be able to forgive was a mystery. The calamities which had fallen to her lot were terrible. But no one, so far as he had been able to ascertain, had ever wronged her—unless she held herself wronged by the legislature that had sternly exacted from her son the penalty of his crimes. Mrs. Chevalier was not a person to be cross-questioned ; and

he had not been able to enquire from herself what was the meaning of her wish to learn to forgive.

The old woman began pouring out her tea. Making one cup very sweet she offered it to her visitor, handing it slowly, so that her hand should not shake, with a delicate grace of courtly politeness, as she said,

‘It has only just been made. The rector does not drink tea.’

Sipping the old lady’s Orange Pekoe, Octavius Jaffray said,

‘I came to see you to-day, because I thought to-morrow was the rector’s day, and the day after I am going to Cornwall, and I have things, which I fear are of importance, to tell you. First of all—I am staying at Belmont. The children sent me a line that they wanted to see me.’

The old lady was all attention.

‘ Ah,’ she said. ‘ I was going to tell you when I next saw you that I wished you could spend a day or two there. I wanted to hear your opinions. Their coming to Belmont has been a subject of much satisfaction to me. The servants have, of course, seen the children, and tell me things about them. The young people interest them. The rector also speaks of them. I hear a good deal.’

‘ I wondered whether you had thought of such a thing as seeing them yourself?’

‘ I did think of it, Octavius, when they first came down here : they seemed so near. But I think of it no more. The world and I are altogether estranged ; and the things that are nearest me are very far away. Between me and my children there is a chasm which neither I nor they can cross. I chose it to be so. Let it remain.’

She spoke regretfully, but with a firm

decision; and asked, in a tone that dismissed the subject,

‘Tell me what you have seen at Belmont. I have been wishing to hear.’

‘I see many changes.’

‘I understand that Mrs. Peyton is very ill. It is commonly reported about here that the whole household are anxious and unhappy.’

‘They are unhappy.’

‘The children too?’

‘Much more so than they were at home.’

The old woman seemed to think.

‘I cannot help it, Octavius,’ she said, wearily. ‘Even so what was done was the best.’

Her cold face set stonily; not, however, into any semblance of resentment; only with an iron resolution to endure this one sorrow more with all the rest.

‘If it turns out so,’ said Octavius Jaffray.

A sudden light flashed up in the old woman’s eyes, alert, resolute.

‘Tell me,’ she said.

‘Mrs. Peyton is near her end. The change of scene, from which the medical man anticipated so much, has made no difference to her depressed condition : and she is growing weaker every day. In fact, at last, the woman is succumbing to the fears that have tormented her for the last two-and-twenty years ; and is dying of fright.’

‘She was always a fool,’ observed Mrs. Chevalier. ‘We must thank the Almighty for providing us with her when we wanted her.’

‘Amidst these new scenes the slow estrangement that has been for years imperceptibly growing up amongst the different

members of the family has suddenly revealed itself in the shape of positive antipathies—between the elders and the children, and between the man and his wife.’

‘I admire Mr. Peyton—and am sorry for him,’ replied the old woman, slowly.

‘Meanwhile—he has suspicions.’

‘New ones?’ she asked, quickly.

‘No. I think not. But—last night he spoke.’

‘Ah! What did he say?’

‘The young people were standing in the verandah in the moonlight, and he called my attention to their complete unlikeness to all the members of his own and his wife’s family.’

‘He must have remarked that long ago,’ said the old woman, composedly.

‘There is a very long distance between

seeing and speaking, particularly in a case of a man like Peyton.'

'Yes, I admit that. Go on. You have not yet told me all.'

'Mrs. Peyton will not survive the winter.'

'Good. She is the last. All the others are gone.'

'Only—at the end—if she speaks! I detect in her lamentations a note I have not heard before—repentance—remorse—I do not know what—other fears besides those of her husband.'

'I understand. Let me think.'

Leaning her weary face on her thin hand, Mrs. Chevalier bent her head and remained some minutes absorbed in thought. The silence in the room became almost sepulchral. At last she looked up.

‘I think it likely,’ she said, ‘that she will resolve to speak. But she will never have the courage to do so. I am not afraid of that.’

Octavius Jaffray looked relieved.

‘Peyton,’ he resumed, ‘made another remark that struck me. He says that his wife’s death will make a great change in his family.’

‘How old is he?’

‘Fifty-five.’

‘He will marry again. That is only natural. He is convinced that the children are not his. If he has other children—that will not matter. He would never be unjust to the young people. I admire that man, Octavius. He has a fine character; and he has been shamefully used. But, now that you have told me all that is important, let me hear something about the boy and girl.’

‘Only, I have not told you all,’ began Octavius Jaffray, hesitatingly. ‘There is still something—I am afraid the worst—to come.’

‘I am ready for it,’ said the old dame, tranquilly. ‘Speak.’

But she leaned back in her chair, and fixed her dark eyes on him.

‘This is about the girl. In one of her jealous fits—a week or so ago—she suddenly attacked her cousin. They were on a bridge over one of the deeper ponds.’

He stopped. Something in the old woman’s eyes told him that she had guessed all the rest.

She said nothing, only sat motionless, as if she had been suddenly turned to stone, with her dark eyes rivetted on his.

It was not until she moved, turning her face away, that he continued to speak.

‘I learned it from herself. I had a long talk with her.’

‘Tell me all about it; all that you heard,’ said the old woman.

The reader is already acquainted with all that Octavius Jaffray had to relate; and his story need not be here repeated. The old woman sat listening, leaning back in her deep chair, motionless, silent, with her eyes bent upon the ground. A ray of afternoon sunshine crept in through the casement, and fell on Octavius Jaffray. He felt it, and was grateful for its warmth; for somehow he felt cold. Notwithstanding his familiarity with the scene around him, the dark chamber, the sombre light that stole in through its heavily-mullioned window, the thick shadow of its walls, and the listener’s still silent attitude, there was something weird in the relation of this terrible history of a girl’s sudden ferocity,

told in this ill-omened house, in this dark, melancholy old room, haunted with so many sorrows, to this weary, lone old woman, who had crept away to hide her intolerable forlornness from the world.

When he had finished, she still did not speak until after the lapse of some minutes; and then only to say,

‘The old story! Jealousies! When they are jealous they are beside themselves. I know all about that.’

‘I think,’ proposed Octavius Jaffray, gently, ‘that something should be done to separate those two girls. Rosamond’s position is really very cruel. Unfortunately, Peyton will not take any steps. He merely remarks that his wife should manage her children better.’

‘Tolerably significant,’ remarked the old woman, drily.

‘It is. Only, whilst he is of this way

of thinking, to do anything is difficult. Still he knows that the young people are favourites of mine, and will sometimes take a hint. I have advised him to get the girl married.'

The old woman smiled her thin, sombre smile.

'A man's remedy, truly. And—suppose that her lover or her husband should treat her no better than Mr. Peyton has done?'

'Her position would not have been so galling if Mr. Peyton's niece had not come to live with them.'

'That is true. Only, something unforeseen always happens. You will not be able to ward off the unforeseen by providing her with a husband. If her brother could have made her a home with him——'

She spoke meditatively, and broke off as if absorbed by her own thoughts.

‘ Only he is going to marry his cousin,’ said Octavius Jaffray.

‘ And so the inevitable woman appears on the field. Why do you men have anything to do with women, Octavius?’

‘ It is our destiny. Everything is destiny.’

‘ Some things are,’ replied the old woman. ‘ Or heredity—which is the same thing. I am sorry this has happened, but after all that you have at different times told me about the girl I have had my fears. I am much obliged to you for coming at once to tell me. Only—I see nothing that can be done. I did what I could. I am sorry that the children are not happy. But, even so, what was done was the best.’

‘ It was : and what must be—must be.’

The old woman began to speak of Lennox and his studies, and then pressed Octavius Jaffray to stay and dine with her. That he declined. It was imperative

that he should return to Belmont about the time that he was expected ; and, after remaining but a little longer, he rose to leave. As he was going, Mrs. Chevalier said,

‘ When Mrs. Peyton dies there will be real changes. I hope more from that than from anything else. Be on the spot as soon as you can after the event. See what ensues, and let me know.’

CHAPTER V.

‘THINGS,’ said the Buddha, ‘proceed from anterior causes ;’ and few of the world’s greatest sages ever made any profounder remark. The obviousness and simplicity of the assertion may prevent unreflecting people from perceiving the width and importance of its meaning ; but it is nothing less than a summing up in a single sentence of the mystery of all those potent influences with which and against which man contends in the battle of life. All the mighty forces, over which the indi-

vidual possesses no control, are really the result of things that took place before his little moment of existence began, and it is worth while to observe that most of the ridiculous and impossible wishes of the various classes of foolish people who want the world to be different from what it is amount to little else than a desire that things should not proceed from those anterior causes which existed so long ago, which made the world such as man finds it, and certainly cannot now be altered, because it is impossible to prevent anything that has happened from having happened.

Rosamond Peyton was forming reflections of a kind very similar to the above, only in a rather vaguer and more popular way, having summed up all her conclusions in the sentiment,

‘Chance : and who can help it ? Mr. Jaffray calls it destiny.’

The reflection was provoked by a very simple, though distinctly tragical incident of very humble life, which she had been watching for a couple of minutes or more whilst her father was giving instructions to a mason engaged in mending a wall.

Near the top of that wall was a small hole, just such an one as forms a perfect palace for a snail. Also an old snail was making a journey towards that hole with as much speed as Nature has bestowed upon his species. It was a longish journey for a snail, as his glistening track left behind him showed. Now, however, he had arrived near his destination. Only between him and the goal of his persevering endeavours was a spot where rain and air had loosened a little flake on the face of

the limestone wall, where, no doubt, there was a soft spot in the texture of the stone occasioned by some unknown accident in the settling of the sludge at the bottom of the sea of the carboniferous ages—how many millions of years ago? Anterior certainly by a long time to the existence of this enterprising old snail. Whilst Rosamond watched, the unsuspecting creature reached the loose flake and had crawled a part of the way across it, when its weight caused the morsel of stone to give way, with the result that the unlucky snail came down with a thump—all the heavier because the stone stuck to it—into a stone gutter, and was smashed in a manner suggestive of small chance of escape from hungry birds.

‘Chance: and who can help it?’ said Rosamond to herself: and reflected that

most of the calamities of existence come about in the same manner.

Only she was wrong in saying ‘chance :’ the secret of destiny is not chance, but ‘anterior causes.’

Such little causes, too, and so remote, but pregnant with such big events.

She had little suspicion that she was herself at that very moment the plaything of a similar small accident—whether to prove so disastrous as that of the unlucky snail or not, remains yet to be seen.

This morning she and Eleanor were to have driven with Mr. Peyton to a neighbouring country town to make some purchases. Howbeit, two days before, a friend of Eleanor’s, who was in Paris, finding herself unemployed and a little dull, sat down to amuse herself with writing Eleanor a long letter. Being of the femin-

ine gender she dwelt in her letter more upon her toilette than upon anything else, and mentioned a number of *Nouveautés de Paris*, which made Eleanor declare the letter, when it this morning reached her hands at breakfast-time, ‘*most interesting.*’ Also it modified her views about her future purchases, so that the drive to the little country town was for the present postponed.

‘Eleanor has changed her mind, and does not want to go now. So, of course, we are none of us going,’ said Rosamond to Lennox, in no particularly amiable tone.

So, instead, Mr. Peyton set out after breakfast to see what the masons, whom he had employed, were doing for certain walls that required their attention. And, later in the morning, Rosamond, on one of her solitary strolls, came across him talk-

ing to a man at work on a wall near the lodge gates.

‘Are you going into the village?’ asked Mr. Peyton.

‘I am going nowhere in particular, papa.’

‘Then I wish you would post a card for me. You will be in time for the mid-day post.’

He drew a postal-card from his pocket-book, and wrote a few lines upon it, whilst Rosamond watched the adventure of the snail.

Just as he gave it her they both became aware of a stranger approaching them, walking up the drive from the lodge to the house.

Now, had Eleanor’s friend in Paris not been in sore want of something to do, Eleanor would not have received that long letter from her. Before this Mr. Peyton

and both the girls would have been a good many miles from Belmont. They would not have returned until after the visitor had left; and it is quite possible that the intelligence which he received at Belmont might have dissuaded him from visiting that part of the country again. So Rosamond and he might never have met—had not some girl unknown to them, and five hundred miles off, been in want of something to do.

The man approaching them was Marmaduke Torres.

As he drew nearer, Mr. Peyton, who had met him more than once, immediately recognised him, saying to Rosamond,

‘This is your brother’s friend, Torres.’

He stepped forward to meet him, Rosamond remaining a little behind, but regarding with a shade of curiosity this

friend of her brother's who had been described to her as a man who never opened a book, but walked, rode, drove, shot, boated, yachted, smoked, dropped in at his club when he was in town, and stayed at other people's houses when he was not, was a downright good fellow, and made himself generally busy with doing nothing; a personage with whom she felt it might not be difficult to sympathise.

Mr. Peyton had by this time shaken hands with him, and they were coming back together towards her.

‘My daughter, Mr. Torres.’

Rosamond bowed, and Marmaduke Torres lifted his hat politely.

That was from mere force of habit. He had not at the moment the faintest notion what he was doing; whether he was returning as a gentleman should the salute

of the young girl bowing to him, or behaving with the stupidity and *gaucherie* of a clown. For an instant he was simply lost in amazement; scarcely able to believe the evidence of his eyes, which were presenting to him, thus unexpectedly, the lady numbered '104' in the catalogue of the Royal Academy, as if she suddenly stepped, differently dressed, out of her picture-frame.

Only, she really was uncommonly handsome: and those dark eyes of hers, he could actually imagine their looking like they did in her picture. Remarking which, he exchanged his first complete surprise for the more manageable emotion of admiration.

A woman detects admiration, as a man detects beauty, instantaneously, and already Rosamond was agreeably conscious of a man's eyes regarding her with an

attention that meant the lapse of some days at least before he would forget the impression she made on him.

‘Mr. Torres has come to call upon Lennox,’ her father was saying.

Turning to Torres he began to explain that he would certainly find Lennox at home.

Meanwhile, Rosamond regarded her new acquaintance. A bit of a dandy in his dress, but a good-looking man; distinctly like what Lennox had described him, by no means intellectually brilliant, but a nice fellow.

Mr. Peyton was offering to walk up to the house with him, but he declined that.

‘You have only to follow the drive,’ said Mr. Peyton. ‘We shall meet again at luncheon. Of course you will stay to luncheon?’

Thanking him, Marmaduke Torres raised

his hat to Rosamond, and proceeded on his way.

Rosamond bowed with a little smile.

As she did so, she again caught that unmistakable light of admiration in her new acquaintance's eyes.

‘Who is he, papa?’ asked Rosamond; it must be feared a little for the pleasure of hearing something about a man who so plainly admired her.

Whilst Mr. Peyton explained who Marmaduke Torres was, and—which was, from the point of view of a man of Mr. Peyton's way of thinking, much more important—who ‘the Torres’ were, Marmaduke Torres himself proceeded towards the house, at a walk a good deal slower than his ordinary pace, being much engaged with his reflections, and with this surprise from which he had not yet entirely recovered.

This was she! The lady to be seen on

the walls of the Academy—and the young person whom he had some years before met, in the wet, on the river at night. There could be no doubt about it. The *tout ensemble* of her tall, slender figure, her shapely head with its crisp, black hair, her sensitive nostrils, and small, ripe, crimson lips, and her eyes, those deep, limpid eyes with their brilliant blackness, with their glances capable of penetrating like steel,—to be mistaken in them was impossible. Only, she was a great deal handsomer than on that evening six or seven years ago when he met her on the river. She was extraordinarily handsome, almost as handsome as the picture represented her. What was the history of that picture? What were the young lady's own views about having been presented to the public as an impersonation of neglected jealousy? And what was the whole history of that

nocturnal adventure on the river? Some passionate freak of an irresponsible child of sixteen? With what an air she had told him he would be a cad if he tried to find out who she was!

Well, he had found out at last. Would she presently recognise him? She could hardly have forgotten the incident of their meeting.

And he said to himself,

‘I don’t quite know how thankful I am that I behaved properly to her.’

Peyton’s sister! It was with Peyton that he had been to look at her portrait. And Peyton had said nothing. He must have recognised her. Did the family disapprove? Or what did it all mean? And it was to Peyton that he had afterwards related the history of the girl who wished to drown herself; who desired to be taken off the same evening to town.

That Peyton had made no comments upon that was easier to understand.

‘ Only if I had had the faintest suspicion that she was his sister I should not have told him ; or at any rate not quite in that fashion.—I have told that story since to two or three other men. Somehow, I fancy I will bury it for the future in a discreet silence.’

Lennox Peyton was in the library, busied in making some notes.

A servant entered with a card.

‘ The gentleman is in the drawing-room, sir.’

‘ Torres !’ exclaimed Lennox to himself.

Instantly he thought of Rosamond ; fortunately she was out. He would have time to prepare Torres for a surprise.

Or should he manage that he and Rosamond should not meet ? Anyhow, he could not keep his friend waiting. Be-

sides, it was always a pleasure for him to meet Torres.

‘Delighted to see you, my dear Torres,’ he said, shaking hands. ‘I fancied that you might pay us a visit, but rather expected to hear from you first.’

‘I should have written, only this was quite a sudden idea of mine yesterday to run over and see you. I have my yacht laid up for a day or two at Weymouth. You know that my moves are always more or less erratic.’

‘Come into the library, and have a cigar,’ proposed Lennox.

‘With pleasure.’

‘Hard at work, Peyton, as usual,’ remarked Torres, when they reached the library. ‘I wish I could work like you do. You must learn as much in a year as most men do in a life-time.’

‘Hardly that. These are notes of some

of the reading I was doing when we met in London.'

'All these! A good lot, is it not? I can't imagine where you find the time to do all this writing, Peyton. By Jove!—He was turning over some of the papers—'They look as if you had been writing ever since you were born.'

He regarded the heap of papers respectfully, as a man might look at some collection of curiosities which he was altogether incompetent to understand, and yet could not help admiring.

'I only wish I had your talents, Peyton,' he concluded. 'Thanks.'

That was for a cigar which he proceeded to light.

Having lit it he wandered round the room, smoking it, looking at the view from the window, the things on the tables, Lennox's pens, and tapes, and pen-wiper, and

Spanish poniard in a tray, and the back of the books in the shelves, talking all the time, and interrupting his other remarks to comment upon his friend's passion for study, with such remarks :

‘ Wish I could read up things like you do, Peyton.’

Like many other unbookish men of a good sort, he entertained the profoundest admiration for studious pursuits of any kind ; not least of all because he himself found the labour of learning anything absolutely intolerable : whilst he regarded Peyton in particular as a sort of paragon of learning and laboriousness.

Presently, sitting on the edge of one of the tables, he remarked,

‘ I met your father as I was walking up to the house. He is looking very well.’

‘ He is very well, thank you.’

‘ Oh, by the way, he had a lady with

him—to whom he introduced me—your sister, I fancy, Peyton.'

'I did not know that she was with father.'

He was thinking,

'So the die is already cast, it seems.'

'Was she dark or fair?' he asked.

'Very dark : tall and slight.'

'Yes, I expect that was Rosamond.'

'Only, Peyton, look here,' began Marmaduke Torres, with a shade of hesitation ; 'why did you not tell me ? That was a portrait of your sister that we saw at the Academy—that afternoon you and I went in together.'

'It is not unlike my sister,' admitted Lennox. 'I suppose it must have been painted from some girl who resembled her.'

'Well, most girls are alike, I admit. Still, some are different. And—I never saw any other girl a bit like that ; except your sister.'

‘I know that there is a great resemblance, Rosamond herself admits it. I brought her some of the engravings of the picture in the illustrated catalogues and journals.’

‘But—you mean that your sister did not sit to the artist?’

‘Certainly not.’

‘Well then—I’m hanged if I understand it,’ said Marmaduke Torres.

Lennox was thinking. Some allusion to the adventure on the Thames would no doubt come next. Had Torres recognised his sister as the heroine of that adventure, too? And, when Rosamond saw him, had she recognised him?

He was not long kept in suspense.

‘Do you remember, Peyton,’ his friend recommenced, again speaking with some hesitation. ‘You dined with me, you know, that evening—after we had been to

the Academy—and I told you a story of a girl that I met one evening on the river. That was your sister too.

‘ You recognised her ?’

‘ At once. She is altered, of course. She was hardly out of the nursery then : not nearly so good-looking as she is now. But I should have recognised her in an instant anywhere.’

‘ Do you think she has recognised you ?’

‘ Can’t say. But that was your sister, Peyton ?’

‘ If you press me, I believe that it was. But I did not know that at the time when you told me your story—and I have no proof of it now : only, I conclude so from things I have heard. My sister is not a girl whom one can ply with questions. And the fact is that none of us had the least suspicion of anything of that kind

having taken place. Do not speak about it to anyone here, there is a good fellow: above all, not to my sister herself.'

'You have told her that you heard about it?'

'Never. I could not.'

'You have then no idea what were her reasons—for all that?'

'None. Except that she must have been much more unhappy than anyone supposed: which is self-evident. Beyond that I know nothing: and forbear asking questions. For me, at any rate, my sister's secrets are sacred.'

Marmaduke reflected. The tall young lady with dark eyes was evidently a personage of whom people stood in a little awe. That accorded well with the picture of her in the Academy. He felt distinctly curious to know a little more about her.

Only for the present it was clearly ex-

pedient to change the subject of conversation.

‘All this time I have not inquired after your mother,’ he said. ‘I hope that the change of air continues to do her good?’

‘I fear that it is less beneficial than we anticipated,’ replied Lennox. ‘Mother is very weak. In fact, we are all very anxious about her.’

‘Sorry to hear that. Who is this, Peyton?’

He had taken up a photograph of Eleanor.

‘My cousin, Miss Kirby.’

‘Oh, the cousin to whom you are engaged. Pretty girl, Peyton.’

He replaced the photograph on the table, without any further remark. Apparently Eleanor’s charms did not much impress him.

And in less than five minutes he was

again talking of Rosamond ; saying among other things, in an apologetic way,

‘ You see, Peyton, it was impossible for me to know that that girl was your sister. She would not tell me her name. Had I had the least suspicion who she was, I should not have told you about her quite as I did.’

Their conversation was interrupted by the appearance of Rosamond herself.

She came to ask if her brother could give her a new pen. All her own had become unusable. It must, however, be confessed that this was the merest excuse for a visit to the library.

Whilst Lennox rummaged a drawer for some pens, she and Torres fell at once into conversation.

‘ You were at college with my brother, were you not, Mr. Torres ?’ asked Rosamond.

‘And at school.’

‘Then you will not have been surprised to find him cooped up here with his books on a lovely summer day like this. Lennox never thinks of anything but his studies : and a holiday is the cruellest punishment which it is possible to inflict upon him.’

‘He is a lucky fellow, I have been telling him so. I wish I was like him.’

‘You are not a reading man?’

Torres laughed.

‘I am afraid not,’ he answered, comically.

‘Ah, that is like me,’ laughed Rosamond. ‘I am altogether incapable of study—unluckily.’

‘Unluckily! You ought to say “Fortunately.”’

‘Fortunate to be a dunce! I thought you were a moment since envying Lennox.’

‘Oh : but you know, a bookish woman, that is quite a different thing.’

‘Do you really think so?’

‘Rather.’

He spoke with a strength of conviction about which there could be no mistake. And how his eyes kept on stealing to her face, as if its attraction was irresistible.

She appeared to him handsomer than when he had first seen her.

Lennox had found some new pens, and began hinting that if Rosamond would amuse their visitor for a minute or two he would have time to arrange his interrupted work before quitting it for luncheon.

‘Nonsense, Lennox, it is just luncheon-time,’ said Rosamond.

Personally she would have enjoyed a stroll to the end of one of the shaded walks and back with her new acquaintance.

But she was not going to make herself too cheap. Under the influence of his admiring glances, the instinctive coquetry, latent in every girl, began to develop itself rapidly.

Yet she did wonder a little what this man had seen in her that made him regard her with more attention than any other man had bestowed upon her.

CHAPTER VI.

SHE was right about its being luncheon-time. The gong rang almost immediately ; whilst Lennox was laying some letter-weights upon the papers which he had no time to gather up.

In the dining-room Marmaduke Torres was introduced to Eleanor by Mr. Peyton.

Rosamond on the other side of the table stood watching what would ensue with mistrustful eyes.

‘ I shall receive no more attention, now that she has appeared,’ she was saying to herself.

Torres, she noticed, looked at Eleanor rather keenly. He had a habit of taking a quick, keen look at any pretty girl. But, to Rosamond's surprise and satisfaction, the universally admired Eleanor appeared to make no particular impression on him.

Had Torres been asked why, he would have asserted that he had seen 'no end of girls like Miss Kirby.' Familiar types had no particular charm for him.

During luncheon, when not talking to Mrs. Peyton, who had many questions to ask him about his mother, he addressed his conversation chiefly to Rosamond.

'I like your sister, Peyton,' he said, when Lennox and he were again alone together after luncheon. 'She is not like most of the girls one meets.'

That was the highest compliment he could pay any young lady. Unluckily he so often discovered afterwards that he had

been too hasty to conclude that some new acquaintance of the gentler sex differed materially from the rest of her kind. Lennox was not ignorant of that fact, and accepted the praise bestowed upon his sister for what it might be worth. Perhaps he made too little allowance for the natural effect upon his friend's imagination of an unexpected encounter with a young lady whom he had previously met under very peculiar circumstances. But he knew something of Marmaduke Torres, and could not forget that Torres's desire to meet with an unusual type of girl was a result partly of a certain degree of susceptibility, and partly of divers rebuffs, which had contributed considerably to forming Marmaduke's opinion of the painful similarity of feminine dispositions.

‘Her resemblance to that picture in the Academy is really startling,’ continued

Torres. 'But I should have known her again without having had that to jog my memory. I have been watching her, to see if she would recognise me. Though she did not do so at first, I fancied she might after a little while. But she does not.'

'That is satisfactory,' observed Lennox, with emphasis. Seeing his friend regard him, he continued in explanation, 'You do not know, my dear Torres, how bitterly Rosamond can resent a discovery which she might consider a humiliation.'

'Ah, that is one way of looking at it, certainly. I think though that you may make your mind easy, Peyton. You see she would be far less likely to remember me than I to recognise her. It is not likely that I made nearly so vivid an impression on her as she did on me. I do not suppose that she looked at me very

attentively, and my part in the adventure was a good deal less dramatic than that she played. Also the incipient moustache of a man in his first year is a rather different thing from——’

By way of conclusion, he stroked the heavy growth of hair on his upper lip, and added, with a laugh,

‘It is not exactly a compliment, but the lady has altogether forgotten my personal appearance, Peyton. She can hardly have forgotten the incident.’

To judge from his voice, the last reflection afforded him a certain degree of satisfaction.

‘By-the-way,’ he continued, ‘did you hear your father at luncheon ask me to put up here for a day or two? I think you were talking to Miss Kirby at the moment. I hardly knew what to say. I mean—if your mother is not very strong

just now—I do not want to be a nuisance.’

‘ You would not be that at all. Mother keeps mostly in her own rooms upstairs. I am sure father would be pleased to have you here for a day or two. You see, we have none of our old friends about us here. What are your own plans?’

‘ I want to see this place, Wold, you know, where my father was killed. I thought I would perhaps put up at the railway hotel. I should have asked you to have me if I had known when I was coming. Only, you know the erratic nature of my movements. I could not suddenly drop upon you from the clouds.’

‘ Nonsense, man. Now you are here, stay with us as long as you can. Try to make it at least a week. I want to drive to the station by-and-by. We will bring up your luggage from the hotel. Only you must not expect to see Wold, except

from a distance. No one is admitted to the house.'

'Not even when Mrs. Chevalier is away from home?'

'Mrs. Chevalier is never away from home. But never mind that. Stay with us as long as you can.'

Marmaduke Torres accepted the invitation. For what reason—seeing that the aim of his coming, the visit to Wold, had turned out to be an impossibility—need not be discussed.

At afternoon tea it was announced that he would remain a few days at Belmont.

'So you have made up your mind, Mr. Torres, to remain with us a little while, after all,' said Rosamond to him. 'That will be a real treat to Lennox. He has often been wondering whether he would see you here.'

She was already taking possession of

her new acquaintance, as if he somehow belonged especially to herself.

Torres rather liked that.

In his quest of the girl not of an ordinary type he had not concerned himself with the consideration that it would be becoming of the lady when discovered to take a little notice of himself: but perhaps that 'understood itself,' as the Germans say.

Only Marmaduke Torres was not thinking about that. He was rather watching Rosamond, for the present, with a dim misgiving that this new lady of his admiration might, as on some previous occasions, turn out after all a failure. 'just like all the rest.'

During the greater part of afternoon tea he had her all to himself. Lennox Peyton was talking to his mother, and Mr. Peyton to Eleanor, by whose charms Torres appeared to be still untouched.

Rosamond had her hat on. After tea she and Lennox and Torres were all to drive to the railway. Torres, because he wanted to get his luggage from the railway hotel; Lennox, because he had some inquiries to make at the station; and Rosamond—because she always drove with Lennox; because no one wanted her at home; because she was incurably restless—and no doubt for twenty other reasons which she would have mentioned on the spot, had she been asked for any.

The trap was announced as ready, whilst they were all busily chatting over their tea-cups, and in a very few minutes the three started on their expedition.

In the shafts they found a distinctly smart little mare which Mr. Peyton had purchased a few days before.

‘ Nice little roan that,’ remarked Torres, approvingly.

‘I thought you had better take her, miss,’ the groom was saying to Rosamond; ‘she was not out yesterday.’

‘I hope she will not be troublesome,’ was Rosamond’s answer.

They were soon off. Rosamond with the reins in her hands—she had offered them to Torres, who had immediately replied, ‘No : you drive, Miss Peyton,’—Torres at her side, and Lennox on the back seat.

The mare was decidedly skittish : but, on the whole, Rosamond had her well in hand. Now and then Torres came to her assistance with a word of advice, as if they were already on quite familiar terms.

‘You are an expert driver, Mr. Torres, I expect,’ remarked Rosamond.

‘Well,’ he replied, ‘I think I do know something about driving.’

‘Whilst you are with us, I shall get you to give me some hints.’

Never at a loss for subjects of conversation that appeared to interest them both, they chatted incessantly, keeping the talk almost entirely between themselves, Lennox seldom adding a remark. Lennox was not a great talker.

After passing through the village, as they came in sight of Mrs. Dromere's absurdly named abode, Rosamond, pointing out with her whip, remarked,

‘I believe that the lady who lives there is a cousin of yours, is she not?’

‘Oh,’ replied Torres, ‘is that where Florence Dromere lives?—It looks like a rather ruinous place.’

Wee Nestie struck him as by no means the sort of residence in which he would have expected Florence Dromere, from his recollections of her, to have taken up her residence.

‘I think she lives there only because

she cannot let the house,' explained Rosamond.

'Do you know her?'

'Oh, yes. We see a good deal of her at Belmont. She is rather a favourite of Eleanor's.'

'I must call upon her,' said Torres.

A minute's silence followed, and then he asked,

'Did you see Major Torres when he was down here?'

'The man who accidentally painted the wonderful picture of me?' returned Rosamond, with a little laugh. 'No.'

'Was it *accidental*, Miss Peyton?' inquired Torres, with a shade of incredulity.

'It was, I assure you. I have never seen the man nor heard of him—until Mrs. Dromere mentioned him.'

And so they began talking of the celebrated painting.

When they reached the spot where, on the occasion of Lennox's arrival, they had stopped for a minute or two to look at Wold, Rosamond reined up,—much against the inclination of the mare,—saying to Torres,

‘Of course you want to see Wold? Everyone does who comes down here. This is the only glimpse of the house that is to be had anywhere.’

She called his attention, as she had previously called that of her brother, to the fact that the few windows which were visible had all their shutters closed.

‘If you want to know anything about Wold,’ remarked Lennox, ‘Rosamond can tell you about as much as anyone. She has laid the whole village under contribution for information, from the Rector's housekeeper, who knows the whole history of the place for the last thirty years, to the

smallest urchin that occasionally works in the Wold garden.'

'You see, Mr. Torres,' Rosamond hastened to explain, 'when one lives in such an out-of-the-way place as this, there is not much to occupy one's attention. Besides, there is something so weird about the strange, lonely life which poor Mrs. Chevalier lives up there, separated from all the world, that one cannot help wishing to hear about it.'

'Of course you know, Miss Peyton, that the Mr. Torres who was murdered there was my father?'

'My brother told me.'

A silent minute passed, whilst Marmaduke Torres sat with his eyes rivetted upon the lone house upon the summit of its solitary hill, where his father had died a violent death. The eyes of the young girl at his side followed his, except when

the restless mare demanded her attention.

‘What strange thoughts that house must make him think!’ she reflected, and felt sorry for him.

Surely, if there was any one in the world who might claim a permission to visit Wold, he might. Yet it seemed also that, seeing who lived at Wold, he was the last person who should ask to enter the house.

Perhaps that was one of the lone woman’s reasons for living there, to keep watch over the scene of her son’s crime, that strangers should not come to gaze at it. Poor, solitary woman!

‘I should like to see the place,’ said Torres. ‘In fact, that was one of my reasons for coming here.’

‘I am afraid that is quite impossible, Mr. Torres,’ replied Rosamond.

‘One could not bribe the servants?’

‘They are all devoted to their mistress.

Poor woman ! you know she is to be pitied. And do you not think that it would be a little heartless to intrude upon the sad solitude into which she has withdrawn ?’

Torres regarded her. She had made one of those speeches so natural to women’s lips, which convince men that women, howsoever great their faults and follies, really do possess some superlative refinement of feeling, not within the reach of the harder sex.

‘ I suppose the woman is to be pitied,’ conceded Torres, not very readily. ‘ But I fancy that she is an awful woman. At least, I have always heard my mother say so.’

And he again regarded the windows of Wold. Was it perhaps from one of these that his father had taken his last look at the world to be seen beyond the ring of trees encircling the house ? In any case

the last days of his father's life had been spent amongst the scenes in which he now found himself.

He could just remember his father, with a child's dim recollection.

As they drove on again, he said to Rosamond, 'Since I cannot possibly see the place, I must get you to tell me as much as you can about it.'

That Rosamond was willing enough to do; perhaps not without a secret hope lurking somewhere in her thoughts that she might, in return, learn from him a few further details of a history that had for some reason taken so firm a hold of her imagination.

But the mare began again to be troublesome, and presently, as they passed a particularly white milestone, not only shied, but very nearly bolted.

'Take care, Miss Peyton!' cried Torres.

Putting out his hands, he caught the reins to bring the mare back to her senses with a hold requiring greater strength than the young girl's arms possessed.

For a minute his strong hands and wrists and her gentler ones all nestled close together, whilst his right arm and shoulder and her left were pressed against each other, and they were both conscious of that magnetism of a touch that thrills two human existences when brought into sudden close contact.

When does love begin, love that steals in unknown upon human life, and is only discerned when it has already become potent, and makes itself felt by its anxious happiness, its fascinating melancholy, its joy so full of cares, its yearning care so full of joy?

When they set out to return home, Rosamond said,

‘I think you shall take the reins, if you do not mind, Mr. Torres. That mare has nearly pulled my arms off.’

He at once assented, and the mare, recognising at once the touch of an experienced hand, gave them no trouble on their way back.

Sitting at his side, Rosamond was only the more free to chat with him all the way about his yacht, his boating excursions, his walking and riding tours, and all the other occupations of his busy, idle life.

She was finding conversation with him not amusing only, but indescribably refreshing. He never made a remark which she could not understand.

Presently she gently nudged his elbow, and signified by a movement of her eyes that he should cast a regard behind him.

It was long since Lennox had joined in all their conversation. Now, on looking

at him, Torres discovered that he had in his hand some pocket volume which he was diligently reading, occasionally making memoranda with a pencil on its margin.

Torres and Rosamond exchanged a smile, and then continued their busy chatter as before.

Yet whilst Rosamond was dressing for dinner her spirits sank. She did not know when she had so much enjoyed a drive, had been so much interested, so pleasantly amused. Only what satisfaction was there in that? She would presently feel merely so much the more bitterly humiliated when her admirer transferred all his attentions to Eleanor. Marmaduke Torres was not the first man who had evinced a disposition to take some notice of her—until he became aware of her cousin's superior charms. After that, good-bye to attentions and delicate little acts of consideration,

and a back seat where she might watch at her leisure the effects of Eleanor's greater attractiveness. Like everyone else, Mr. Torres would be sure to go over to Eleanor in the end. They all did—even Lennox. Perhaps he would even fall in love with her. Lennox had once or twice said something about his friend's being of a rather susceptible disposition. Then Lennox and he would quarrel about her; and, by way of adding to all her other misdeeds, Eleanor would be the occasion of parting Lennox from his oldest schoolfellow and college chum.

‘We women are hateful creatures,’ quoth Rosamond to herself. ‘The world would be ever so much better without us.’

She came down into the drawing-room fairly out of temper, and, when Torres appeared, evinced a certain indisposition for conversation with him that set the man

wondering what on earth he could have done to affront her—or what her brother could have been saying to her about him.

Presently Eleanor entered the room ; and seeing that one of the young ladies did not appear to wish to talk he had little choice but to address himself to the other, whilst Rosamond looked on, with a light in her eyes which, had he noticed it, would have reminded him of the picture in the Academy.

Eleanor made herself agreeable. She never did anything else.

And Rosamond, tapping the floor with her foot, too softly to attract attention, and holding her handsome head defiantly erect, said in herself,

‘ Of course !’

During dinner, however, Torres appeased her.

The conversation had taken a political

turn, and presently became a little profound.

‘That was all that was wanted to finish it,’ reflected Rosamond. ‘When he sees that I cannot talk like papa and Lennox and Eleanor, he will have done with me.’

She had instantly dropped out of the conversation and devoted her attention to the grouse on her plate in morose silence.

Only, presently observing that Torres, who sat at her side, was also saying nothing, she stole a side glance at him.

His face was absolutely blank, the blank face of a man sufficiently well bred to betray nothing of his thoughts, but, otherwise, resembling no expression under the sun save that of an individual who is silent because everyone around him is talking in an unknown tongue.

Catching Rosamond’s eye, he instantly

turned to her with a sort of relief, and asked,

‘Do your arms still ache, Miss Peyton? That mare did pull a bit.’

After which Rosamond felt happier.

Later in the evening, in the drawing-room, he enquired,

‘Your people talk a good deal of politics, and art, and all that, Miss Peyton?’

‘Rather,’ replied Rosamond.

‘H’m. Your brother is an awfully clever fellow, you know. And your father—of course he is an unusually accomplished man. I suppose Miss Kirby has crammed up all that because she is going to marry your brother.’

‘Oh, you know, she is awfully clever, too,’ replied Rosamond. ‘It is only I that am a dunce.’

‘And I,’ he laughed, gaily. ‘But I should think you must sometimes find

it awfully dull when they talk like that.'

'It seems that Eleanor's erudition is wasted this time,' was Rosamond's reflection when he left her, which was not for some time.

Yet on the next day, and the next after that, she still could not be quite persuaded that he was really going to prefer herself to her cousin.

'He will find out presently that I have no accomplishments, or that I have an awful temper,' she said to herself. 'And then he will go over to Eleanor. They all do.'

CHAPTER VII.

ONLY, he did not.

On the second evening Florence Dromere dropped in by invitation to dinner, and afterwards there was some music in the drawing-room. When Eleanor had sung, and Mrs. Dromere played, he asked Rosamond,

‘Do you sing, Miss Peyton?’

‘No.’

‘Play?’

‘No.—I don’t even know my notes.’

‘Really.—What a mercy!’

Rosamond looked at him, whilst her pretty lips pouted in an amused smile, one of a quite new sort, only bestowed upon him.

‘I mean, you know,’ he explained, ‘that this music and singing gets to be something quite too monotonous. It is all very nice, of course; only, don’t you see—when they all do it—and they all *do* do it—and a fellow does not care very much for listening to it.’

Rosamond was smiling again the same new smile that looked so arch, and showed her little, even, white teeth like a row of pearls.

‘Still—when he sees my beautiful temper,’ she reflected.

But the next morning he had an exhibition of that too.

He happened to be standing with her under the verandah when Eleanor came up

with the announcement that she was going to drive with Mrs. Peyton. She had ordered the groom to harness one of the older horses.

‘You had better take the mare,’ suggested Rosamond. ‘She was not out again yesterday.’

‘Only, you know dear, dear uncle likes me to drive sometimes,’ explained Eleanor, ‘and the mare pulls so. If you were going out this afternoon, you might take her.’

‘Oh, yes. I know *I* might take anything,’ flashed back Rosamond, on the spot, her eyes lighting angrily as she spoke. ‘Anything will do for me—won’t it?’

When Eleanor had left them, she turned to Torres and said,

‘I have a bad temper, Mr. Torres.’

‘You don’t say so,’ he replied, with a little laugh, as he proceeded to light a cigarette.

Rosamond had dropped into a chair near her.

Suddenly she looked up at him.

‘And when I am angry, Mr. Torres, I don’t care for being laughed at.’

Torres regarded her. How awfully handsome she was ; ever so much handsomer than he thought her the first time he saw her. Her beauty was of a kind that grew upon the imagination,—just like the beauty of her portrait in the Academy : for it was a portrait of her, a portrait of her very soul to the life ! And how exactly she was still the same girl that he had met upon the river.

‘I beg your pardon,’ he said at once.

He wished nothing less than to affront her. She interested him amazingly ; and he wanted to stand in her good graces. Besides, he had seen by this time that,

with the sole exception of her brother, all the household were against her, and all the chivalry that was in him was up in her cause.

‘But, you know,’ he continued, sitting down near her, and bending a little towards her, in the attitude of a man bent on coaxing a girl from her displeasure, ‘I do not think you should vex yourself. No woman can ever learn to drive by just trundling about the lanes with some sort of overgrown tame kitten. If I were you I would stick to driving the mare till I had learned to manage her. We’ll have her out this afternoon ; and I will show you one or two things.’

Rosamond had risen.

‘You are nice to me,’ she said, turning away—something had come up in her throat that would have choked her if she

had not taken care. 'If you knew how seldom anyone is so!'

'I do know, Miss Peyton,' he replied, quickly, not looking at her, but straight before him across the lawn. 'I am not blind.'

When they that afternoon returned from their drive, Rosamond was agreeably conscious that she was moving in a new world.

For the first time for years she was happy. How divine a thing that was—to be happy: to have emerged, if for a few days only—for her happiness could only last while Marmaduke Torres remained with them—out of the ceaseless humiliations and hopelessness into the sunshine of some one's appreciation, with the evidence before her that it was possible for her also to command some one's admiration, some one's regard.

All the rest of Torres's visit to Belmont—in the end he spent a week with them—passed like a dream.

He never wavered from the allegiance which he had at once shown her. Florence Dromere came a second time to dinner, and he dined once with her at Wee Nestie—a good deal against his will, it seemed to Rosamond. But he evidently had no particular liking for his cousin, although he had some years before made desperate love to her. Lennox told Rosamond the whole history. And Rosamond said only, 'How absurd!' Eleanor he regarded as a distressingly commonplace young lady, 'just like half-a-million other girls.' No remark of his afforded Rosamond greater satisfaction than that.

Still he made himself faultlessly agreeable to Florence Dromere, and to Eleanor too, and indeed to everyone. A

plesanter visitor could not be imagined. He was able even to win a little laugh from poor Mrs. Peyton, on the one or two occasions when she found herself strong enough to come downstairs, and talked of the various fashionable people and their doings to Mr. Peyton by the hour. He could talk glibly enough on any topic of that kind. But he was essentially Lennox's guest, and Rosamond's, and spent more of his time with them than with any of the others. He even managed—to Mrs. Peyton's great delight—to coax Lennox away from his studies on five afternoons out of the seven.

Meanwhile, the interest which he and Rosamond took in each other increased apace. Beginning from the moment of their introduction it was ripening already into a real cordiality of mutual regard. Each succeeding day found them more

familiar. Morning after morning the greetings they exchanged were franker and more confident. Evening after evening their good-night was accompanied by brighter smiles of mutual goodwill. All day long they chatted and laughed together, exchanging their thoughts and opinions with less and less reserve, and growing confidential with the *naïveté* of children who become in the course of a day as intimate as if they had been acquainted for years.

On one occasion when they chanced to be talking in the classic summer-house, where Lennox often read, Torres began to speak of Major Torres's picture that so much resembled Rosamond. That was after a moment's pause in their conversation, during which they had both been looking at the sunshine, looking at the flowers, listening to the low rustle of

leaves, listening to the songs of the birds, and breathing the soft fragrance of the air, with that glad consciousness of joyous existence that comes sometimes with human life—though more rarely than most people wish.

‘And, do you know, Miss Peyton,’ Torres said presently, ‘I could quite imagine your being jealous like that girl in the picture.’

‘I do not think you know anything about how jealous I can be,’ replied Rosamond, speaking low. ‘If I were to tell you, you would be surprised.’

‘Tell me,’ he answered at once.

‘Perhaps I will some day: not now.’

He did not press her. He had even in these few days’ time to perceive the truth of her brother’s assertion, that she was not a girl who could be questioned. As for any ideas he might have cherished—even

after what Lennox had told him—of speaking to her of their former meeting on the river, he had entirely relinquished them as altogether impossible.

But it was not unusual for her to speak to him in a semi-confidential way as she had done on this occasion in the summer-house. Whensoever she did so, she said things that maintained the character of originality with which his fancy had invested her.

At the end of one afternoon—when, returning from a walk, they were strolling back to the house through the woods—some accident led to their discussing the trial, at that time being reported in the daily papers, of a woman who had poisoned her husband.

‘The miserable coward of a woman!’ said Rosamond, with superlative contempt.

‘There is a sort of excuse that may be

pleaded for her conduct,' replied Torres. 'He had treated her very badly, and made her furiously jealous.'

'Jealous: yes. I admit the righteousness of her jealousy. But poison—such meanness.'

'You do not think that even jealousy excuses murder?'

'I said nothing about murder. Of course nothing excuses murder: it is horrible, monstrous. Only'—she paused, and concluded, speaking slowly—'a moment of passion—one could understand—but meanness!'

'You mean to say?—I am not sure that I understand.'

He waited for her answer.

The spot through which they were passing—the surprise of her reply, about to follow, was destined to photograph it indelibly upon his memory—was a hollow

full of tall beeches growing rather close together, the ground between them covered with a plentiful growth of dog-mercury.

‘I mean,’ said Rosamond, speaking with deliberation, ‘that if the man I loved, the man who ought to love me, treated me ill, I might kill him; only, you know,’—her voice broke into a little laugh—‘I should use something straightforward, a pistol or a knife.’

Torres looked at her, and then at the beech-trees, at the enamelled leaves of the ivy that climbed their stems, restlessly moving in a bright breeze, at the dog-mercury at his feet, at the green light that fell glittering and sparkling into the little dell.

Did the girl know what she was saying? Her accent was that of a woman who spoke with full knowledge of the meaning of her words.

Only, what an avowal! He had never met with any other girl the least like her.

Already she was speaking of something else, as if her last utterance had been a remark of some ordinary kind.

But, though she was thus at little pains to conceal from her new friend the darker traits of her character, there had never been a time—perhaps not even in her childhood—when her perverse impulses had lain so completely dormant, and the nobler part of her character had been so completely in the ascendant—as during this week of Marmaduke Torres's visit to Belmont. The sense of a great happiness stealing gently upon her exorcised her gloomier thoughts, and, diverting her attention from the humiliations that under ordinary circumstances rankled so bitterly in her bosom, made her fully contented with the pleasure of looking forward from

one bright day to another. For the moment, she was superlatively indifferent to the preference shown her rival ; and even felt no longer jealous of Eleanor's attractiveness, now that its empire was at last proved, after all, not to be universal.

So much was this the case that Marmaduke Torres found himself altogether unable to account for her wild freak of attempting, some years before, to get herself drowned on the river. She was shamefully used : about that there could not be two opinions. But she seemed to know how to bear with spirit the injustice done her. He could only explain her conduct by the hypothesis of some caprice of girlhood's proverbially perversesest epoch. He had seen but little of the real life of the household at Belmont.

The change in her escaped no one's notice, and least of all that of Eleanor.

In accordance with the universal traditions of her sex under similar circumstances, Eleanor was disposed at once to look on with amusement, to drop innuendoes, and to make playful little remarks. Those resulted generally in Rosamond's turning away with dignified contempt. But they sometimes brought the colour to her cheeks and a flash of anger into her dark eyes, and once she turned suddenly upon her cousin with the exclamation,

‘It is really a pity, Eleanor, that all your education cannot keep you from making an idiot of yourself.’

But she was just at present vastly indifferent about Eleanor.

All that Marmaduke Torres saw of Wold was that he and Lennox walked up one afternoon to the lodge gates. They came back reporting that the desolate appear-

ance of the place had made a weird impression upon them.

The day before Torres left, Rosamond was not quite so happy. It was impossible to avoid a conviction that, after he had taken his departure, she would miss him horribly.

She consoled herself, however, with a conviction that it would not be so very long before she saw him again. She would be able to look forward to that.

Was she quite sure that she would see him again? she asked herself.

‘Yes,’ she answered herself, ‘I am quite sure. I shall see my admirer again.’

It amused her to call him in her thoughts her admirer—this one man in the whole world who had espoused her cause, and had not found her detested cousin the more attractive girl of the two.

Did she know how much she would look forward to seeing him again? Did she know what that waiting for him to reappear meant? How far were the things true that Eleanor hinted which brought the colour to her cheeks? Girls know that they are going to love, that they have perhaps already begun to love; and do not know it; both at the same time. To be quite clear on the subject, they want time to think. All her time had been occupied in being happy.

When Marmaduke Torres left, with an assurance from Mr. Peyton that, should he be in the West of England, they would all be very glad to see him at Belmont, she accompanied him and Lennox to the station to see him off.

Lennox saw the luggage labelled, whilst Rosamond and Torres walked up and down the little platform together.

After he had taken his seat in the train, he said,

‘I shall try to look you up again.’

‘Do,’ replied Lennox.

And Rosamond, ‘Don’t forget that you have promised to come.’

As Lennox and she drove back to Belmont she was taciturn, but superlatively happy. Already she felt that she was not going to miss ‘her admirer’ so much as she feared. She would look forward to his coming to see her again. She meant by that time to have learned to manage ‘Nelly,’—that was the name of the mare. She had Nelly in the shafts now, and already had profited by the lessons which Torres had given her. And she was going to have time—to think.

To think!

Already her whole existence was drifting into one wide, happy dream. The days

succeeded each other, and she was no longer alone, she was no longer the slighted, friendless girl who possessed no attractions for anyone. *He* was with her in this melancholy, unjust home of hers. He was with her everywhere. She felt his presence in the breakfast-room, when she came down in the morning, though he was not there to greet her. She could see him in the library with her brother. He sat at her side at dinner; and in the drawing-room took a chair to talk to her, whilst Eleanor sang her songs, and executed those wonderful musical *tours de force* of hers, of which he had found it 'a mercy' that she was incapable. He waited for her in the hall as she descended the stairs; he opened the doors for her to enter, he came across the room to meet her. His image seemed to emerge from the objects around her, and the air of itself whispered into

her ears the words he had said, and the replies she had made to him—of which not one word seemed to have quitted her memory. He strolled with her across the lawn: he sat at her side in the dog-cart when she drove Nelly: he walked with her in the shady parts of the woods. But one place there was more sacred than all the rest; one spot on the verandah, that place where she had said to him, ‘You are nice to me. If you knew how seldom anyone is so!’ And he had answered, ‘I do know, Miss Peyton. I am not blind.’ She knew the exact square of black marble on which he had stood when he spoke, the exact square of white marble on which the chair stood in which she had been sitting when she rose, with those words that came unbidden to her lips, a cry of gratitude out of her heart.

She liked to put that same chair back

into its place, in the very same position, and then to sit and think of him.

To think of him—and how she loved him !

She knew that now.

And he loved her. He was coming again to Belmont because he loved her, not for anything else. He would have come again under any circumstances. Only, it was all the easier for him to come since her father had pressed him to renew his visit. That was a lucky accident.

Only, that was not any accident at all. Mr. Peyton had eyes as well as Eleanor. And had he not, Eleanor would not have left her ‘dear uncle’ uninformed about anything that she saw going on in the house. And Mr. Peyton thought of the advice his old friend Octavius Jaffray had given him ; very sensible advice, as Jaf-

fray's advice always was. If young Torres would take a fancy to the girl, that would be a better match for her than any Mr. Peyton could have anticipated. For which reason Mr. Peyton was not leaving anything to the management of chance—a proverbial bungler—but quite prepared to make Torres welcome whenever he came for as long as he chose to stay, and to afford him and Rosamond every opportunity of seeing as much as possible of each other.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE account Lennox gave of the lonely picturesqueness of the gates and lodge at Wold, led Eleanor to the conclusion that the spot should make a pretty sketch. Accordingly, one afternoon, Lennox and she drove up the hill. Eleanor made her little water-colour sketch, whilst Lennox entertained himself with reading, and the old horse with idly cropping the grass by the road-side. They returned at dinner-time with a pretty little picture.

The upshot of that was that Rosamond observed, a day or two later,

‘ If Eleanor can go to look at the gates at Wold, there can be no reason why I should not. The place interests me more than it does her.’

One afternoon, in the course of the next week, as Lennox and she started for a drive in the dog-cart, she remarked,

‘ We will go to Wold this afternoon, Lennox.’

‘ The road is a nasty one at the top,’ said Lennox. ‘ Do you not think it would be better to choose an afternoon when we have one of the quieter horses ?’

Rosamond was driving Nelly. She never now drove any of the other horses if she could help it.

‘ We shall manage. I want to see the place,’ she replied.

‘ It is a nasty road if Nelly is troublesome.’

When they reached that upper part of

the winding route to Wold which was least frequented, the road turned out worse than Rosamond had anticipated. Nelly had a strong objection to the old, barkless trunks of fallen trees by the wayside, and became irritable at having her pace constantly checked as Rosamond made her pick her way amidst the ruts and stones and over the rough inequalities of the road.

‘How did you manage here when you came with Eleanor?’ she asked, as they stopped for the fourth or fifth time.

‘We did not drive so far up as this. We tied the horse to a gate below here, where the road began to get bad, and walked up.’

‘I am afraid we cannot do that with Nelly.’

‘I will wait with her here whilst you walk on,’ offered Lennox.

‘No. Come, Nelly.’

They proceeded on, Rosamond talking to the mare, who was learning to know her, and not only to understand her, but also to realise that she was no more to be trifled with than other people who had stronger arms.

They succeeded in reaching the lodge. The lonesome spot interested Rosamond much more than the wide view over the Devonshire hills, to be had from the gate a little lower down.

‘These gates make me think of things, Lennox,’ she said.

‘What things?’

‘I think of Mr. Torres, and the last time he passed in through those gates, little suspecting that he would never pass out again alive: and of the people who brought out the dead man whom they found in the well: and of Mr. Chevalier passing in and out

all the time that the dead man was hidden there—he remained at Wold, you know, and pretended that Mr. Torres had gone away one evening after dark. And I think how he himself came out of that gate under arrest. How terrible it must all have been. You cannot see a dozen yards into the grounds. They seem almost as much neglected as the road.’

They stopped for a minute or two whilst she satisfied her eyes. Then she said,

‘Get down, Lennox, and help me to turn Nelly round. I am afraid of turning the dog-cart over in these gigantic ruts.’

Having done as she desired, he resumed his seat, and they proceeded slowly down the hill.

‘I am afraid you will have to get down again presently and to coax Nelly past those logs,’ said Rosamond. ‘It would

never do to have her shying and bolting down this hill.'

She had scarcely spoken when a pheasant starting up close before them flew across the road into cover.

Nelly shied on the spot, and bolted.

An instant later Lennox became conscious that he was flying through the air. With a smashing of dry branches of dog-wood he came down amidst a thickish bed of weeds in a ditch, more surprised by the suddenness of what had happened than by anything else. The whole was so instantaneous that he had no idea of what had taken place.

Picking himself up, somewhat bruised, but hurt in no serious way, he looked about him.

Rosamond lay in the road some dozen yards from him. Further down the hill

the dog-cart with a twisted wheel was entangled in a bush. Nelly, who had not fallen, stood still in the shafts, shaking with terror, but unable to move.

He went at once to Rosamond. She was trying to rise, but seemed to find some difficulty in doing so, and managed to sit up only as he reached her.

‘Is Nelly hurt?’ were her first words.

‘I do not think so. But you?’

‘See to Nelly first. You are not hurt, Lennox?’

‘Not at all.’

‘Go to Nelly, Lennox.’

He obeyed, a little reluctantly, for Rosamond was pale; and her voice suggested that she was in pain. But he knew that nothing except obeying her behests would content her. So the most rapid way of coming to her assistance was to do as she wished. Nelly he found frightened

only. After speaking to her to reassure her, and having satisfied himself that it was impossible for her to dislodge the dog-cart from the bush in which it was entangled, he returned.

‘Nelly is all right,’ he said, as he approached. ‘And she cannot get away. Are you hurt, dear?’

He had knelt beside her.

‘I feel bruised all over. I came down I don’t know how, and rolled over these nasty, great stones. My arm hurts me awfully. It is so odd. I cannot move it.’

She was as white as a sheet.

‘Which arm?’

‘My left arm.’

Lennox took the arm in his hands.

‘Oh, Lennox! Don’t! For pity’s sake. I shall faint. You are torturing me.’

She half sank upon the road, with a low cry of agony.

Her brother had released her arm, but more than a minute passed before she raised herself sufficiently to rest her head on his shoulder.

‘I am afraid I am going to faint, Lennox.’

‘Are you in great pain?’

She did not answer, and her head sank. After a minute she raised it again, saying,

‘I am better now. Not so faint. It was your touching my arm that gave me such agony. I am afraid I have broken my arm.’

Lennox looked around him. What was he to do?

‘Do you think you could walk as far as the lodge?’ he asked.

‘I will try.’

He assisted her to rise, and, after one or two ineffectual attempts, she managed to do so, leaning against him trembling.

‘ I feel as if I had broken every bone in my body,’ she said, with a faint smile. ‘ I am all bruises.’

He passed his arm around her, and placing one hand on his shoulder, she said,

‘ Let us try to get to the lodge, Lennox.’

They had not far to go ; but he could see that the effort was taxing her strength to the utmost.

‘ I suppose that, though the grounds are interdicted, they will let you sit down in the lodge, whilst I go and get help,’ said Lennox, on the way.

‘ I am sure I hope they will,’ she replied.

She was only too conscious that her strength was leaving her.

Lennox rang, and the same woman who

had admitted Octavius Jaffray appeared. The surprise with which she regarded them was undeniably discouraging.

Lennox explained apologetically. Their horse had been startled and his sister thrown from the dog-cart. He feared that she had broken her arm. Might she sit down for a while, whilst he went to get assistance?

The woman looked grave.

‘I cannot admit anyone without orders from Mrs. Chevalier, sir,’ she said. ‘I am very sorry, sir. But my husband and I would be dismissed on the spot, if we opened the gate to anyone without orders. If the young lady would wait outside I would bring her out a chair, sir.’

She appeared willing enough to lend them any assistance she could, if to lend any had been in her power.

‘If you would kindly do so, we should

be very much obliged to you,' replied Lennox.

Rosamond had leaned her shoulder against the gate-post to get a little support from that in addition to what he was giving her. Her lips were faintly parted with an expression of weary pain, and she was scarcely conscious of what her brother and the woman were saying.

The woman left them and reappeared with an old arm-chair. Unlocking the wicket, as if she were a little uncomfortable even about opening the gate to bring them her chair, she set the chair in the road against the gate-post.

Rosamond dropped into it—and fainted on the spot.

The woman, who had taken the precaution of locking the gate behind her, and Lennox, stood regarding Rosamond with alarm.

‘Is the young lady much hurt, sir?’

‘I fear so.’

He did not know for what restorative he should ask the woman. It seemed unlikely that she could give him any. But he inquired whether she had any brandy.

She had not. Her husband and herself were teetotallers.

‘But I am sure the housekeeper would let you have some, sir. My little girl could run up to the house.’

Lennox took out his card.

‘If she would say that I am extremely sorry to give so much trouble. Only I fear my sister is very much hurt. If Mrs. Chevalier could only give me permission to leave my sister in the lodge whilst I fetch a medical man.’

Taking the card, the woman returned to her cottage, re-locking the gate after her,

and a minute later Lennox had the satisfaction of seeing a little lass of about ten scamper off with his card. The woman, returning from her house, came and talked to him through the gate.

‘I suppose you came up to see the view, sir?’ she remarked. ‘A good many people do.’

But Lennox hardly knew of what they talked. He was wondering what he ought to do for Rosamond, lying motionless and insensible in the old arm-chair, wishing that the trap was available, so that he might drive at once to the house of the nearest medical man, and chafing at the child’s protracted absence and the slow minutes that seemed as long as hours.

At last the little lass came back running. She had a scrap of paper in her hand, which she gave to her mother, as she said,

‘Father is coming with the Bath-chair.’

Her mother unfolded the paper. It was an order from Mrs. Chevalier :

‘Admit the young lady and her brother, and ask them to come up to the house.’

‘Mrs. Chevalier says please will you come up to the house, sir,’ said the woman, unlocking the gate.

And at the same time a man appeared with a Bath-chair.

He assisted Lennox to place Rosamond in the chair, and they set out towards the house. Rosamond still remained insensible.

Mrs. Chevalier herself, her tall, thin figure imposing in her black satin gown and widow’s cap, stood on the steps of the porch with her housekeeper.

As Lennox raised his hat, she said,

‘Mr. Peyton, I believe?’

‘I do not know, Mrs. Chevalier,’ he

replied, 'how I am to thank you enough for your kindness, or to apologise sufficiently for our intrusion.'

'I live alone, Mr. Peyton, and receive no visitors. But,' she smiled her thin smile, 'my doors are not closed against people who meet with accidents. I hope that your sister is not seriously hurt?'

'I fear her arm is broken.'

Rosamond was carried into the morning-room, and laid upon the sofa. Mrs. Chevalier had immediately taken upon herself the direction of all arrangements.

'I will send for a doctor, Mr. Peyton,' she said. 'You will like to remain with your sister. And one of the servants shall see to your horse and trap.'

'I am afraid that they cannot move the trap. One of the wheels is twisted.'

'They shall see to that, and bring the horse up here. Stay with your sister.'

The housekeeper approached with the restoratives which Mrs. Chevalier had ready on one of the tables.

CHAPTER IX.

‘WHERE am I?’

Those were the first words Rosamond spoke, after slowly opening her eyes, with returning consciousness.

She was looking round the large, old-fashioned room in a bewildered manner, regarding the tall, thin, unknown woman in black satin standing at her brother’s side, and the housekeeper behind them with a bottle of smelling-salts in her hand.

‘Where am I, Lennox?’

He replied, receiving a sign from Mrs. Chevalier,

‘This is Mrs. Chevalier. You are at Wold. You fainted—as you feared you would—and Mrs. Chevalier has been kind enough to have you brought into the house.’

‘Mrs. Chevalier? This is Wold? We are at Wold? How came we to be at Wold?’

She evidently had scarcely understood; perhaps was not yet clearly conscious.

Lennox explained again, repeating what he had previously said.

And she moved as if she would rise.

‘Lie still, Miss Peyton. You are not intruding at all,’ said the old lady, gently. ‘You are here at my invitation: and I am going to keep you a little while—at any rate, until the doctor comes. I have sent

for him; and he will be here before very long. Lie as still as you can.'

'You are very kind. I only hope we are not inconveniencing you,' replied Rosamond.

'Not in the least.'—She sat down as she spoke, on a chair by the side of the sofa whereon Rosamond lay.—'Tell me: how do you feel now? Are you in much pain?'

'A good deal bruised, and my arm hurts me.'

Her eyes wandered from Mrs. Chevalier around the unknown room. Then looking again at Lennox, she enquired,

'What have you done with Nelly, Lennox?'

'Who is Nelly?' asked Mrs. Chevalier, also regarding him.

'Our horse.'

'The horse is all right in my stables,'

said the old lady, addressing Rosamond. 'She shall go home presently when we have first of all attended to you.—Would you like me to send for your mother?'

'For mamma: no, thank you. She would not be able to come, you know. She is not very strong.'

'Well, then, keep as quiet as you can, dear. We will do what is necessary, when the doctor comes. He will not be long.'

'You are very kind,' repeated Rosamond. 'I am sorry to give so much trouble.'

Her eyes rested on Mrs. Chevalier's thin, pale face. She was thinking, as collectedly as her scattered wits would allow,

'So this is Mrs. Chevalier? She is very pale. And she looks sad. But she is very kind.'

There was something in the sad, pale face that attracted her.

Nearly an hour elapsed before the medical man arrived, and it was plain that the long waiting was painful to Rosamond, though she did her best to conceal how much she was suffering. Mrs. Chevalier sat all the time at her side, encouraging her, and persuading her to lie as still as she could. When the doctor at last appeared, he had soon done all that was necessary.

‘A simple fracture of the *humerus*, Miss Peyton,’ he said. ‘You will have your arm in a bandage for about a month, and we must take a little care of you; but there is no occasion for any alarm.’

Mrs. Chevalier accompanied him into the hall.

‘There will be no serious consequences?’ she asked.

‘ I see no reason to apprehend any. She has been a good deal shaken, and has suffered some pain, and just at present is feeling the immediate effects of both.’

‘ Shall I keep her here ?’

‘ She can go home if you like. Still—if you *could* keep her here, until we are quite sure of no feverish symptoms developing themselves—say till to-morrow. We should probably know to-morrow.’

‘ Then I will keep her : at any rate, till I see you again.’

‘ Put her to bed, and keep her quiet. I will send her up something at once.’

Mrs. Chevalier returned to Rosamond.

‘ I am going to keep you here with me for a day or two, Miss Peyton,’ she said. ‘ The doctor thinks it better.’

‘ Only I am sure I do not know how we are to thank you for all your kindness, Mrs. Chevalier,’ said Lennox ; Rosamond

hastening also to express the same sentiment.

There was some little delay about the preparation of a room, though it seemed to Rosamond less than she would have anticipated in a house where visitors were absolutely unknown. When the room was reported ready, Lennox took his leave, bearing with him a note from Mrs. Chevalier to Mrs. Peyton, and certain instructions from his sister respecting things that should be that evening sent her from home.

When he was gone, Mrs. Chevalier's own maid assisted Rosamond to her room, and she was soon enjoying the sense of relief and repose afforded every invalid by a comfortable bed.

How strange to be at Wold! Mrs. Chevalier's guest in this house where no one was admitted. She wanted to think

about it, and could not. Her bruises ached, and her arm was uncomfortable. When she tried to look about her room, her eyes closed of themselves; and her sense of general physical discomfort distracted her thoughts.

Afterwards her medicine arrived, and then she dropped into a sound sleep.

She was asleep when the things which she had asked Lennox to send from Belmont came with a reply to Mrs. Chevalier's note from Mr. Peyton, thanking her for all she had done. Mrs. Peyton had not written because she was this evening too unwell to do so.

The note was brought to Mrs. Chevalier in the drawing-room.

'There is no answer,' she said. 'Is Miss Peyton still asleep?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

‘If she wakes, let me know. And see that she has everything she wants.’

The servant left, and the old lady resumed the thoughts which the arrival of the note and Rosamond’s things had interrupted.

‘So I have seen them, after all! What strange things happen! I shall keep her here a day or two, now that I have her.’

Rosamond awoke refreshed, but with an uncomfortable consciousness of weakness and pain that made her glad to have her breakfast in her room. The meal did her good, and when Mrs. Chevalier, after breakfast, sent to inquire how she was, she was able to give a better account of herself. Whilst awaiting the doctor’s visit she amused herself with looking about the room, reclining at her ease against her pillows.

The room was not a large one for the size of the house, but very much larger than anyone she had previously called her own, and in an old-fashioned way luxurious.

The things which she had asked Lennox to send her had evidently arrived whilst she slept, and were already in their places.

Her eyes wandered round the room examining in turn the old wardrobes and large toilet-table with its many little drawers, a walnut cabinet that occupied the centre of the wall opposite the hearth, a round table with standish and writing materials, the cosy chairs and sofa, even the carpets and the curtains that shaded the mullioned windows. Nothing was new, but everything of a valuable kind: the standish old embossed silver, the furniture carved or inlaid, and the upholstery of a rich plush

that gave the whole room a softly rich colouring. She remembered the report she had heard that Wold was wonderfully furnished and full of curious things. Where she lay she could see out of the window, but nothing was visible save trees.

Some pictures hung about the room, most of them engravings. They too were old, and seemed to Rosamond, who did not know much about such matters, probably also to be rarities.

One of them more especially attracted her attention.

The engraving represented a chamber in a tower, from one of whose open Gothic windows, facing the west, was seen a stone balcony, and beyond, in glorious pageantry, the ending of day, over the quiet distance of loveliest scenery—a broad valley of pasture lands stretching down to

a peaceful beach, a river that wound stilly in the evening light past farm and home-stead, a hamlet with its tall church spire, a slumbering sea, idle ships, and low cliffs curving far away.

The fulness of the evening light flooded the turret chamber, and beat against its walls of stone—the effect of light and shade in the engraving, of all the colour and luminosity of summer sun-down, was marvellous. On the right of the small turret room, beneath a crucifix hanging on the wall, stood a table of rough make, with crossed legs ; upon it a rude cup, a jug, a broken piece of a loaf of bread, and, on one side, a great book lying open.

Two chairs flanked the table, one on either side. In one was a bundle of palms, and a palmer's staff and hat ; on the other, the one nearer the open book, and the great window with its wide view, sat an

old, old man, with keys at his girdle. He sat with bent head, his hands clasped in his lap, as if in prayer, his eyelids drooping peacefully, as though he had been reading in the book, and had fallen into meditation—an old man with no need any more of his palmer's staff, nor of his cockle hat, nor to finish his broken bread—for he was dead.

And in the opposite, left-hand corner of the chamber, by the belfry stairs, clad in palmer's guise, with head and shoulders bowed, his bony hands and arms lifted high as he pulled one of the many bell-ropes, death himself, in skeleton form, tolled the passing-bell.

So graphic was the picture that Rosamond could fancy that she caught the metal boom of the great bell, floating out and away into the evening light, over vale and river and field and farm and hamlet

and home, and cliff and sea and idle ships
—dong!—dong!—dong!

Underneath was written, in a tongue she did not understand, ‘*Der Tod als Freund.*’ What did that mean?

So engrossed was Rosamond by the picture that she was not conscious of the servant’s entering the room to inform her that Mrs. Chevalier wished to pay her a visit, if she felt equal to seeing her.

When Lennox came she had also seen the doctor, who gave a good report. She was to get up to luncheon, but Mrs. Chevalier would not let her go downstairs until dinner-time. They were going to have luncheon together in Mrs. Chevalier’s boudoir; and the doctor thought it as well that she should not attempt to return home before the morrow, as she was still fatigued by the shaking she had received and by the aching of her bruises.

After her brother's departure, she rose and proceeded to the boudoir, where luncheon was soon served. The *tête-à-tête* meal with Mrs. Chevalier was by no means of the melancholy kind she had anticipated. The old lady—though her face remained always inexpressibly sad—had plenty of agreeable conversation, and also made a great fuss over her, so that she could neither avoid an impression that she had never in her life been made of so much importance, nor help contrasting Mrs. Chevalier's air of patient sorrow with her own mother's ceaseless querulousness.

When they had sat awhile after luncheon, the old lady said,

‘I am going to take a little walk in the grounds. You must not come with me to-day. I am afraid you will find staying here very dull. But there is a library at the end of the gallery, take any book you

please ; or, if it amuses you better to wander about the house a little, do so. Go wherever you like. None of the rooms are locked up. You will find plenty of pictures and other pretty things to look at. Only do not tire yourself, my dear. If you are fatigued, come back here and lie down.'

She herself accompanied Rosamond to the library, where she left her, after repeating her assurance that the whole house was at her disposal to roam in so long as she did not tire herself. As the books did not present any great attraction to a person of Rosamond's temperament, she also soon acted upon the permission given her. Roaming from room to room, she inspected the pictures on the walls, the handsome furniture, and the rare ornaments that were scattered everywhere, pausing sometimes to admire the general picturesque-

ness of the rooms and corridors, and sometimes to stand at the windows and scan the view of the grounds ; all the time immensely enjoying this opportunity of gratifying her curiosity respecting Wold, and the sense of seeing what no one else in the neighbourhood had been ever permitted to see. The report that Wold was full of treasures was more than justified. Never in her life had she set eyes on such an array of beautiful things. Having exiled herself, Mrs. Chevalier had made her little world a remarkable one, and the contrast between the appointments of the house and the deserted appearance of the grounds suggested that the old lady herself oftener found her amusement in wandering about her house, as Rosamond was now doing, than in taking exercise out of doors. It seemed to Rosamond that she must be a very wealthy woman. She had no sus-

picion that no single article of furniture or ornament had been added to the collections made by Mrs. Chevalier's husband or son, which she had brought to Wold with her.

Presently, however, Rosamond received another impression. That was in a long gallery well-lighted with oriel windows, that had family portraits hanging upon the walls. Among them was a portrait of a youngish man, in a costume of fairly recent date, whose appearance struck her as somehow familiar.

‘I have seen a face something like that—somewhere,’ she said to herself. ‘I know those eyes and that expression. The eyes are like Lennox’s eyes—a little.’

She sat down in a chair opposite the portrait, and, regarding it more closely, searched her recollection for the face it suggested, but without success.

‘Yet it does suggest some face with which I seem to be familiar,’ she concluded, as she again passed on her tour of inspection.

Another window commanded a view of a walled but neglected kitchen garden, with almost empty beds. As Rosamond surveyed it, her eyes lighted upon a well. It stood at a little distance from the house, where the land began to slope away towards the woods. Around it was a square platform raised above two or three shallow brick steps, in the centre of which the well stood, its mouth encircled by a brick wall some two-and-a-half feet high, coped with broad level stones that made a kind of lift.

Was this *the* well?

Whilst she stood regarding it, she perceived her hostess, walking with a stick, coming slowly along one of the walks.

Drawing back a little so as not to be seen, Rosamond watched her. Upon reaching the well, the old lady mounted the steps with caution, and then stood by the well-side. She bent over the well, and seemed to look in. After a minute or more she again descended the steps, and proceeded on her way towards the sunnier end of the garden, where she presently disappeared.

‘Is that *the* well, I wonder?’ mused Rosamond. ‘And does she often go like that to look at it? Poor old lady! How good she has been to me!’

CHAPTER X.

SHE had returned to the boudoir before Mrs. Chevalier came in to tea, and remained there till it was nearly time for dinner, resting on the sofa, and turning over a volume of prints which she had found in the library, whilst her hostess read.

But during dinner they talked. Rosamond spoke with enthusiasm of all the beautiful things which the house contained, to which the old lady replied,

‘I am glad that you were able to amuse yourself, my dear.’

After which she began to ask Rosamond questions about her brother, seeming to be interested to hear of his studies, and of his academical successes.

‘The rector has spoken to me of your brother,’ she said. ‘He thinks him a young man of great abilities.’

It had already struck Rosamond that intellectually her hostess was a good deal more a woman of Eleanor’s stamp than of her own, and she replied modestly,

‘I am afraid, Mrs. Chevalier, that I cannot tell you as much as I ought to be able to tell you about Lennox’s studies. I am sorry to say that I am a shocking dunce; and do not understand a bit all the things in which Lennox is so much interested.’

‘No?’ said the old lady.

‘Oh, it is my own fault—or principally my own fault. When I was a little girl I

was always in disgrace about my lessons ; and, at last, they grew out of patience with me, and left me to be as ignorant as I chose. Afterwards, when I found what a gulf I had put between myself and my brother,—and that other people could talk to him about the things that interested him when I could not,—I saw how foolish I had been, and tried to learn. Only, it was too late.’

‘ You do not look like a girl who could not learn, Miss Peyton,’ said the old lady, in her low, even voice.

‘ I *could* have learned. I am sure of that. Only——’

‘ Only ?’ repeated Mrs. Chevalier, and waited.

Rosamond looked up.

The old woman’s dark eyes, always full of expression, were fixed upon her with interest, whilst some pity for her appeared

in the wasted, colourless face, so inexpressibly sad and weary, that was irresistible.

‘I have a cousin, Mrs. Chevalier,’ said Rosamond, a little nervously. ‘I daresay you may have heard her mentioned. Everyone talks of her. She is pretty, clever, accomplished; she is everything that is attractive: only I *hate* her. Before she came to live with us, my father and mother loved my brother and me: but she stole all their love away from us. My brother is wise: he is a man: and, besides, he loves my cousin. He has been able to bear being supplanted: I have not.’

She spoke hurriedly, with a sense of suffocation, as if the words choked her, and with her dark eyes flashing passionately.

‘You are jealous of her?’

‘Yes.’

The admission was short and abrupt.

‘Dismiss her from your thoughts, Miss Peyton. There are many things in this world beneath our contempt: if we have only self-respect enough to disregard them.’

‘If I do not succeed in following your advice, Mrs. Chevalier, I shall still remember the kindness with which it was offered,’ replied Rosamond.

She was already beginning almost to love this sad, lonely woman who had been so kind to her.

In the drawing-room, after dinner, their conversation became quite confidential. Having once admitted that fierce jealousy of her cousin which had been the bane of her whole existence, Rosamond found no difficulty in speaking of other details of her life, her loneliness, the distastes of her parents for her brother and herself, and

their love of each other. How little she suspected that her hostess already knew all that she was telling her! Something was even said about how it came to pass that she had chosen to drive Nelly up the road to Wold; 'a gentleman, a friend of her brother's, had advised her to learn to manage the mare.' But she discreetly avoided mentioning Marmaduke Torres's name, and gave as a reason for the drive the celebrated view, not her curiosity to see at least the lodge gates of Mrs. Chevalier's premises.

From time to time a spell of silence fell in the midst of their conversation, as will happen when people are talking confidentially. Then Rosamond's eyes wandered around the dimly-lighted, luxurious room, its shadows rich as those of a masterpiece, its vague dimness out of whose distances shone here and there the

reflection of a mirror, the gleam of a gem, the indistinct outline of some work of art; whilst her reflections busied themselves with this strange adventure of her being a visitor at Wold, with the stillness and beauty of this lonely, melancholy house where no visitors entered, and the kindness of the old woman who irresistibly attracted her.

‘ You must breakfast upstairs again to-morrow, Miss Peyton; but I think you may come down directly afterwards, though you are looking a little tired now.’

Rosamond was tired. But she was thinking also that she would return to Belmont from Wold with regret.

When the medical man arrived, Mrs. Chevalier saw him first.

‘ I am going to keep Miss Peyton until to-morrow. You understand?’

He understood enough to tell Rosamond,

‘ You are getting on capitally. I think we need be under no apprehension of fever. Still—you shall stay where you are another day. To-morrow you may go home.’

‘ Not to-day?’

‘ I think not to-day. You want to get home?’

‘ I do not like to impose upon Mrs. Chevalier’s hospitality. She has been so kind.’

‘ I will explain to Mrs. Chevalier. You had better stay where you are until to-morrow.’

But he said to himself,

‘ I wonder what it all means? Is the old woman after all growing tired of living alone? I should have thought that she would have got the girl out of the house as soon as possible, and fully expected to be asked to drive her home with me, after setting her arm.’

‘So I am to keep you prisoner one day longer, Miss Peyton,’ said the old lady, when she came downstairs. ‘You must consider yourself free of the house and grounds, and amuse yourself as well as you can.’

Accordingly about eleven, Mrs. Chevalier being engaged with her steward, Rosamond slipped out of the house for a stroll. The grounds were not large, and she had soon made the complete circuit of the lawns turned into grass for sheep, the neglected gardens, an avenue, and a little morsel of lawn still kept closely shorn. Also she found the well. Its brick steps were evidently seldom trodden, for they were much overgrown with moss and stout weeds. Inside wild plants had forced their roots amongst the brick of the crumbling low wall, and between the edges of the stones around the well’s lips ;

stones themselves entirely covered by various growths of lichens, yellow, and black, and white, and grey.

Within these was only a dark hole. As her eyes grew more accustomed to its gloom, she could see mosses and lichens and small ferns extending downwards for some distance.

Her curiosity led her to pick up a stone and drop it in. The answer of a blow upon something hard almost immediately returned to her ear. The well was dry and of no depth.

She sat down upon its edge. This morning she was carelessly happy. The superlatively feminine pleasure of feeling herself appreciated filled her, and she remained for a while, under the shadow of her sunshade, thinking of nothing, and tasting of her happiness dreamily.

For a moment she had forgotten that

the very stones on which she was sitting were perhaps those on which a murderer had rested the corpse of his victim before throwing it into the water.

She had no suspicion that Mrs. Chevalier had caught a glimpse of her from the same gallery whence she had herself watched the old lady the previous afternoon.

‘Sitting on the same stones!’ said the old lady to herself. ‘What a handsome lass she is, sitting there in the sunshine, with the light playing around her. The strange contrasts of existence! If she knew!’

Perhaps Rosamond knew more than Mrs. Chevalier suspected: for presently the history of the well at Wold returned to her recollection, and she rose wondering whether this was the well, and thinking of a man, with a heavy burden, climbing its steps in the starlight.

The gardener's boy to whom she had spoken, on the occasion of his coming to Belmont with some plants which Mrs. Peyton had bought from his father, was at work at a short distance from her. As she passed him, he stopped his rake, to touch his hat and to say,

‘ Good-morning, miss.’

‘ Good-morning, Jack.’

With a boy's eagerness to have a moment of anyone's attention, the lad began,

‘ That there's the well, miss, where the *perlice* found the corpse. Mrs. Chevalier had it filled up.’

Although conscious of something unbecoming in talking to the servants about the incident that had taken place at Wold, Rosamond could not avoid being interested.

‘ 'Twas in the dining-room, Miss, near

the window,' continued the boy, 'that Chevalier murdered Torres. There's a blood-stain on the floor what can't be washed out. When father helped to lay down the carpet, I *seed* it.'

'Good-morning, Jack,' said Rosamond, walking on.

It would never do to be talking about such things to the servants. After the kindness with which Mrs. Chevalier had treated her, she was ashamed of herself as it was.

But last night at dinner she must have been sitting not two yards from that indelible stain beneath the carpet, and would sit there again at luncheon.

What a dauntless old woman Mrs. Chevalier was, a woman of what spirited superiority to all kinds of vulgar scruples and superstitions, to make use of the room as if nothing sinister had happened in it!

And Rosamond recollected her remark of the previous evening,

‘There are many things in this world beneath our contempt: if we have only self-respect enough to disregard them.’

How many of the contemptible opinions and puerilities of the common herd the old woman had shown herself able to despise in this long retirement, where she bore her bereavement in dignified solitude.

Rosamond was still strolling in the grounds when Lennox arrived to enquire after her.

‘The doctor says that I am not to return home till to-morrow,’ she informed him. ‘But to-morrow you may expect to see me at Belmont to luncheon.’

‘I am glad of that. You must seem rather a prisoner here,’ remarked Lennox, reflecting upon her restless disposition.

‘On the contrary, I begin to feel quite

at home. I could love Mrs. Chevalier. She is a woman Mr. Torres would appreciate ; not commonplace.'

'Father has been talking about her: and says that he does not know what we shall do. He says that it is quite impossible that her kindness should be without acknowledgment on our part. All the neighbourhood is talking about your being here—people can hardly believe it. Mother thinks that, after it, Mrs. Chevalier will call.'

'Call upon us at Belmont!' exclaimed Rosamond. 'Mamma must be taking leave of her wits.'

The tone of the last assertion had a shade of contempt that was certainly not dutiful.

'Only,' remarked Lennox, 'there is some truth in what father says.'

Rosamond paused in her walk.

‘Mrs. Chevalier’s kindness will not go unacknowledged, at least not on my part,’ she remarked. ‘Somehow I think the kindness has been shown you and me—not papa and mamma.—Do you see these grounds, Lennox, and the house? I have been all over the grounds, and into almost every room in the house—even into Mrs. Chevalier’s own room. She showed it me last night before I went to bed. I know where the well is into which Mr. Torres was thrown. I can put my foot on the very spot on the floor [where the blood-stains are. I could point out to you exactly where, when the trees were thinner, Mr. Chevalier saw the blood-red sunset shining through the tree-trunks. But—no human being will ever learn from my lips a word about anything that is within the ring of trees around Wold. That will be my acknowledgment of the kindness

with which my hostess has treated me.'

Mrs. Chevalier kept Lennox to luncheon, and, in the course of the meal, made a remark that was an answer to Mr. Peyton's embarrassment respecting acknowledgments of the kindness shown his daughter.

'Mr. Peyton,' said the old lady, 'you will kindly take my compliments to Mr. and Mrs. Peyton, and tell them that I neither pay visits nor receive them. Were the case otherwise, I would call. As it is, I must beg that any momentary assistance I may have been able to show your sister may be considered as a simple act of common humanity, and as soon as possible forgotten.'—She raised her thin hand, for both the young people were about to protest, and concluded, in her coldest tone, 'Not a word, please. I am expressing my wishes, and trust that they will be respected.'

When Lennox asked at parting whether he should on the morrow come to fetch Rosamond, she said,

‘It will be unnecessary, I will send her home.’

In the afternoon she invited Rosamond, if she was not tired, to accompany her in her walks in the grounds.

As they strolled slowly up and down, Rosamond remarked,

‘May I speak, Mrs. Chevalier, of something that you said at luncheon to my brother?’

‘Speak, my dear.’

‘I cannot forget, Mrs. Chevalier, the kindness you have shown me,’ said Rosamond, slowly. ‘I have been happier in your house than I ever was in my own home—for I have never been treated there with the consideration you have shown me. I have no return that I can make for

your goodness—only—may I say—that no one shall ever hear from me a word about Wold.'

And the old woman answered,

'I should not have asked that, Miss Peyton—but you will be showing a respect for my loneliness that I shall appreciate.'

Rosamond had said that she could never forget her visit to Wold. The last evening of it was one such as no human being would be likely to forget under any circumstances.

Dinner was a little later, or Mrs. Chevalier was a little late for dinner, Rosamond never knew which; but, whatsoever the cause, she found herself alone in the drawing-room before dinner for nearly half-an-hour.

The day was fading, and the room grew dim, for the evenings shortened fast. Out-

side, the low lights, visible from the windows, were melting away, the long shadows of the trees had vanished, but the dark leaves of the holm oaks still wore a shade different from that of the other trees, and the silver birches stood out brightly against the darker foliage behind them. The sinking evening breeze scarcely had strength enough to move the crests of the trees, and the air was full of the song of birds. For some minutes Rosamond stood at the mullioned window, regarding the coming of night, and then sank down on the deep seat.

A morsel of fire burned on the hearth, for it was the way at Wold to have fires when they would not have been elsewhere lighted, and, as the light outside faded, the glow of the flames of the wood logs began to mingle with the last ray of day.

The hour when, although night has not

yet come, it is no longer day, is one that exerts a spell of its own over all minds prone to long reveries. Now the last of the gloaming and the first self-assertion of artificial light mingling together filled the room with soft tones, and strange reflections favouring waking dreams. The silence, always remarkable at Wold, save when the winter winds wailed through the leafless trees and about the lonesome house, became almost oppressive. At such moments imagination, mingling with natural forms but dimly perceived, easily welds together the seen and the unseen, and mingles the real with shapes called into being by the mind; fancy becomes absolute, and illusion, spreading her shadowy wings, brings near the world of things invisible. Realities lose their empire over the senses, and the pains, and hopes, and fears of the moment become forgotten in

the presence of a past that reawakes, and of a future that for an instant lifts its veil.

It seemed to Rosamond that time had for one moment stood still, and that she could fancy going on around her the drama enacted before she was born ; that she heard about the house a man and his visitor, who were jealous rivals, two men who met with smiles and spoke with cordial voices, and all the time hated each other ; that she saw the two men sitting at dessert in the dining-room, talking over their wine, one with his back to the light, and the other looking at the glow of the sunset as red as blood, seen under the trees ; that she could feel the sudden rush of jealous passion that knew not law which fired one of the two ; that she heard the heavy fall of a man struck down dead, and in the silence the dripping of blood ; that her ears caught a muffled slow step crossing

the hall in the darkness, and the splash of a heavy body that fell into the well. At another moment time had taken a leap, and Wold was no longer fenced against the world; the lone, weary-faced woman, who had borne her bereavement within its walls so long, had ended her sorrows and was gone, 'where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest,' where she was all alone no more.

'Surely,' mused Rosamond, 'she will be glad.'

When Mrs. Chevalier came at last, she ordered the lamps to be lighted; and then they proceeded to the dining-room, and dined, and spent the evening together just as they had spent that which preceded.

The following morning after breakfast Rosamond, having attended to the packing of her few things, took a last turn in the grounds, and then, coming in, waited in

the morning-room for her hostess to appear. She was beginning to be acquainted with the ways of the house, and knew the exact hour when she might expect to see Mrs. Chevalier.

She was sorry to be leaving.

The old lady appeared about eleven, and not long after the steward's dog-cart came round to the front door.

When the moment of leave-taking came, Mrs. Chevalier detained Rosamond for a minute.

'You are not always happy at home, Miss Peyton?' she said.

'Not always. I am afraid it is my own fault.'

'I am not sure of that, my dear. Only,'—she laid her thin, light hand on Rosamond's arm,—'if ever you are in real trouble—great trouble—come to me. I can trust you not to come except in a case of

real necessity. Show this,'—she gave Rosamond a little note,—‘at the lodge, and you will be immediately admitted. I hope, I seriously hope that you will never have occasion to use it. And then, if so, we shall not see each other again. You are a good girl. Good-bye, my dear.’

She kissed Rosamond, who found her eyes dimming.

In another minute she was in the dog-cart. As the trap drove away, she looked back. Mrs. Chevalier stood at the window waving her hand to her until the carriage passed out of sight.

CHAPTER XI.

No one appeared at the door of Belnont to welcome Rosamond on her return. Having rung for one of the servants to take her luggage, she shook hands with Mrs. Chevalier's steward—a person of too much importance to be offered a present—and entering the house proceeded to look for her brother. She had some unpleasant sensation of having quitted home to return to residence amongst strangers.

Lennox was not to be found in any of his usual haunts. Giving up the search,

she went to her own room and changed her things. What a contrast between this room, to which she had been consigned because there was no other place for her in her father's house, and the chamber she had occupied at Wold. Her eyes swept the bare walls that had no single ornament. And this was 'home.' No, not home. The old house in Leicestershire was home. What a difference there was between this and Belmont, they all felt. Belmont was a mere lodging-house ; a kind of inn ; a wretched place, good enough for a present to Eleanor. But even at home her room had been unable to compare with her chamber at Wold, with its picturesque proportions, its fine old furniture, and its strange pictures. Her brother's German dictionary should soon inform her what was the meaning of '*Der Tod als Freund.*' She was not going to ask any-

one what that meant. She was not going to say a syllable about Wold to any living soul—not a syllable. But how she regretted to have left the place, and the lonely old lady that had won upon her more in four days than other people had in years!

At length she set out to seek the rest of the household. She must give some account of her return.

She discovered at last a small party under the verandah, Mr. Peyton, Eleanor, and Florence Dromere.

Common-place greetings and inquiries ensued. She was permitted to kiss her father, who did not return her salute—it was years now since he had last done so. She was kissed by Eleanor, whose salute, had it been possible, she would rather not have returned. And she shook hands with Florence Dromere. Every one inquired

after her health. Had she suffered much? Did her arm still give her pain? Was she otherwise feeling well? Did the doctor think that there was no further occasion to apprehend fever? Eleanor's inquiries were the most profuse; Florence Dromere's the most formally polite; Mr. Peyton's referred to the simplest points of facts.

The limited curiosity of the party concerning her own welfare having been soon satisfied, questions next ensued about the Wold, and its proprietress, Mrs. Dromere taking the lead by saying,

‘And now you must tell us all about Wold and Mrs. Chevalier, Miss Peyton. We are all on the tip-toe of expectation to hear all the wonderful things you have to relate to us.’

Rosamond had sat down.

‘I have nothing to relate, neither about

Wold nor about Mrs. Chevalier—except that Mrs. Chevalier treated me with unbounded kindness and hospitality,’ she said, with an air of reserve.

‘But you have *seen* Wold; you have stayed in the house; you know what *some* of the rooms are like, at any rate,’ began Eleanor.

‘The rector has seen Wold too. He visits there every week. You can ask him,’ replied Rosamond.

‘But we have heard all the rector has to say. Besides, he will not say much, as you know. He does not *like* to do so.’

‘Well then, neither do I,’ returned Rosamond.

‘Oh, but you must, Miss Peyton,’ urged Mrs. Dromere. ‘The whole neighbourhood has been talking about your staying at Wold. Such a thing has never been heard of since Mrs. Chevalier came to live

there. All the strangest things are being said, I assure you. I was told yesterday that Mrs. Chevalier had taken quite a fancy to you. Some people are even talking about her making you her heiress.'

'Quite *romantic!*' chimed in Eleanor. 'You *must* tell us, Rosamond. Were you shown the room where the murder was committed?'

'I am not going to say anything about what I have seen, or not seen,' remarked Rosamond, this time with decision, perhaps not altogether without temper.

Mr. Peyton, who had made no observation, rose.

'I am going, Mrs. Dromere,' he said, 'to tell them that you will stay to take luncheon with us.'

Rosamond pricked up her ears. Why was Mrs. Dromere staying to luncheon?

Her father had taken a step or two, and then stopped.

‘By the way,’ he added, still addressing Florence Dromere, ‘we found that magazine about which Eleanor was talking to you two days since, the evening you dined with us. Would you like to have it?’

Rosamond was still listening. Only two days since Mrs. Dromere had dined at Belmont, and now she was stopping to luncheon.

She was also struck by Florence Dromere’s immediately rising and following Mr. Peyton into the drawing-room to receive the promised magazine, as if she was a more familiar visitor than formerly.

But Eleanor’s friends were always favoured visitors.

What would she have thought if she had heard Mr. Peyton say, with a smile,

as Florence Dromere and he crossed the drawing-room together,

‘Miss Rosamond is a very singular young lady, Mrs. Dromere.’

It was unlike his wonted grave reticence to make observations of that kind even to his most intimate acquaintance.

Florence’s only reply was to smile.

‘Where is Lennox?’ Rosamond was meanwhile enquiring of her cousin.

‘I do not know,’ replied Eleanor. ‘I have not seen him since breakfast. We did not expect you *quite* so soon.’

‘You cannot regret my return more than I regret it myself,’ returned Rosamond, with ready pugnacity.

‘Rosamond! How *can* you say such things?’

‘Because they are true, my dear.’

‘And why would you tell Florence *nothing* about Wold?’

‘Florence!’ exclaimed Rosamond. ‘Oh, so you have come to Christian names, have you?’

‘I like her very much. Why would you tell her nothing, Rosamond? I should have thought that you would have been *pleased* to tell her: as she is the cousin of your friend, Mr. Torres.’

The remark was not of a kind to win any remark from Rosamond, and she simply remained silent. Heaving a sigh over her moroseness, Eleanor relinquished further attempts at conversation, and resumed her fancy work with which she had been trifling whilst talking to Mrs. Dromere.

Rosamond sat still, looking about her, whilst thinking her own thoughts. Occupation was by no means always necessary to her comfort. The silence lasted until she presently exclaimed,

‘ Ah, there is Lennox.’ And she called to him, ‘ Lennox !’

He looked up from the book which he had in his hand—he was reading whilst sauntering across the lawn—and came towards the girls.

‘ I strolled down towards the gate, thinking I might meet you,’ he said. ‘ I don’t understand how I missed seeing you.’

‘ I can understand it perfectly, Lennox,’ observed Eleanor, looking up from her work with a playful smile, ‘ if you had a book in your hand.’

A few minutes occupied by Lennox’s enquiries how long since Rosamond had returned, how she was this morning, and how she had left Mrs. Chevalier, and then the gong, sounding for luncheon, summoned the three from the verandah to the dining-room.

After luncheon, Mrs. Dromere made her *adieux*.

‘Come again *soon*, dear,’ said Eleanor.

‘Why is Mrs. Dromere to come again so soon? She seems to be here a great deal,’ remarked Rosamond, when the young widow had taken her departure.

‘She is *so* nice, you know,’ explained Eleanor. ‘Besides, I think dear uncle likes to see her. He is so often dull now—dear uncle!’

Mr. Peyton with his hat on was waiting outside the porch to bid Florence good-bye.

‘Are you coming my way, Mr. Peyton?’ she asked. ‘I hope you are. I came on purpose to ask you something, and all this time I have not mentioned it. It slipped quite out of my head.’

They proceeded towards the lodge together.

Florence Dromere wanted to know who were the masons whom Mr. Peyton employed. He had recently had some walls repaired, had he not? She wanted some work done at Wee Nestie, and was anxious not to employ incompetent hands.

‘The place is in a miserable condition,’ she remarked. ‘When the wind blows, I am quite afraid that it will all come down about my ears. Only, as I cannot let it, I must live in it. I am not a very wealthy personage, as you know, Mr. Peyton.’—This with a little smile.—‘Poor George left me all he could, but that was not very much.’

‘There are openings for young widows to repair their fortunes—particularly when nature has been liberal with her gifts,’ observed Mr. Peyton, with adroit, middle-aged gallantry.

‘I know, Mr. Peyton,’ replied Florence,

pleased with the tribute of a compliment, but none the less making a little grimace, 'only—there are difficulties, you see. I would marry again—but I do not wish the man whom I marry to be able to accuse me of having treated him badly. I shall never care for anyone as I cared for George; and I wish neither to hear my husband accusing me of being less attached to him than I ought to be, nor to be conscious that I am giving him only loyalty when he perhaps would be giving me love.'

'You must look about you for some little business compact on well-understood terms, Mrs. Dromere,' said Mr. Peyton, with a quiet smile.

'I am afraid it will be difficult to find a partner to the contract.—Though, sometimes, honest little arrangements of that kind turn out satisfactory, do they not?

But this is not telling me who are your masons, Mr. Peyton.'

He gave her the address of a workman on whom she might rely, and then they parted.

'Now, shall I have those repairs done or not?' reflected Florence Dromere, as she went on her way. 'Perhaps it will be, after all, waste of money.'

And she fell to thinking of Mrs. Peyton. How much longer would Mrs. Peyton live?

When she reached Wee Nestie, she took the portrait of poor George out of the small bureau.

'I am never going to *love* any man but you, George. You will understand, dear, won't you?' she said, addressing it.

Having kissed the portrait, and replaced it in the drawer, she sat a long time thinking.

Some of her reflections were singular; as, for example, the following:

‘Then I should certainly have Bob down here—at once; which would soon disembarass me of that girl Rosamond. She is just the sort of wife for an artist: something out of which he can make Lady Macbeths and Helens and Hagars and Jezebels, and all that kind of thing. Besides, Bob is much more interested in her than he supposes. These artists never know their own minds. Afterwards, they will both of them be enormously obliged to me. And that will at once put an end to all the nonsense Marmaduke has got into his head about her.’

At Belmont, Rosamond, after wandering about aimlessly for an hour or so, spied her brother reading in the summer-house.

‘What has been going on here, Lennox, whilst I have been at Wold?’ she asked, sitting down to talk to him. ‘What have you all been doing? I have been absent not altogether four days; but I can see that something has been happening.’

‘Nothing that I know of.’

‘Likely enough. You have been buried, of course, in your everlasting books. I believe the house might be burned down whilst you are reading, without your discovering it. But something is going on. What is it?’

It was a minute before he answered,

‘I do not know. Only, I am afraid that mother is a great deal weaker. It is two days since I have seen her; but the nurse gives a bad report.’

‘When I asked Eleanor she said mamma was not very well, but I did not under-

stand that she regarded her condition as one about which we need be anxious.'

'I fear that we have every reason to be anxious.'

'Ah.'

'Why "ah"?''

'I was thinking of Mrs. Dromere.'

'I do not see any particular connection between mother's health and Mrs. Dromere.'

'No. I daresay you do not. Mrs. Dromere seems to come here a good deal.'

'Eleanor likes her.'

'Yes. That might explain it. I hate the woman.'

'I know that she is no favourite of yours. And I am afraid you are not a favourite of hers.'

'I! Am I a favourite with anyone? So mamma is much worse.'

Mrs. Peyton was much worse. She was, as Lennox had said, much weaker. When Rosamond had been at home for a day or two, it began to be very apparent that Mrs. Peyton, who had been for so many years languishing away of her own inherent weakness, had now begun rapidly to decline towards a complete extinction of the small forces which she had at the best of times possessed. Everyone in the house, not excepting herself, perceived it.

Had those very changes of scene and climate which had been supposed likely to do her good proved more fatiguing than beneficial? Had the painful revelation of complete disunion of the family, consequent upon the discontinuance of their old home habits, utterly discouraged her? It was impossible to say. Impossible, too, to say whether remaining at home in

Leicestershire would have delayed the end or accelerated it.

Only one thing could be asserted with certainty. The last of her vital forces were fast ebbing away.

She had ceased to come down stairs. Her last efforts to continue to be one of the family party had been made whilst Marmaduke Torres was with them. After his departure, she almost at once took to her room. Soon she became disinclined to move even about her chamber; rose from her bed only to repose on the invalid chair, and left her chair only to return to bed. Her tongue alone still continued active, babbling 'ceaselessly so long as she was awake, though in feebler tones, of her monotonous unhappiness, of her weariness of life, and of something new, her despair of existence and chill fear of the end.

For she had drifted into a complete

despair of herself, and that of the unreasonable kind. She refused to do anything that her medical man advised, repeating, 'What is the use, nurse? I am pining away.' She would take no medicine, and scarcely any nourishment: 'It could not keep her alive. She knew that she was going to die.' She seemed even to find some pleasure in letting all the springs of life run down, as if tired of the battle of existence, and in a hurry to have done with it.

'I am weaker again to-day, nurse, ever so much weaker. I shall soon be gone. No one wants me. You will all be glad when I am gone. I know that I am a trouble to everyone; and that you will be all glad when I am gone.'

Sad as her end was, (this dreary extinction of a poor, weak life that had so long had no light), there was about it some

element of grimness that struck a discordant chord and forbad those pure springs of tender pity which all spectacles of human suffering evoke. Often she would see no one, not even her husband, and three or four days would pass in succession during which she would not allow her children to come near her. Her antipathy to them seemed to have culminated in some positive hatred even of hearing them mentioned, so that if the nurse spoke of their having enquired whether they might see her, she would for a long time give no answer, and then say, in a tone of resentment, unlike her usual feeble querulousness,

‘I am too ill to see them—too ill. They must not come here now.’

So that Rosamond said one day to Lennox,

‘Do you think mamma’s mind is failing?’

Or why should she not bear even to hear you and me named ?’

‘She is so weary,’ he answered. ‘Everything fatigues her. That is all.’

Eleanor spent a great deal of time with her aunt, and talked about her tearfully, commiserating her ‘dear uncle,’ and pitying the nurse, to whom she was giving all the help in her power.

Her ‘dear uncle,’ meanwhile, seemed to accept what was happening very phlegmatically. Only sometimes it appeared to Rosamond that her father was waiting for something to take place. A new expression had appeared on his grave face—graver than ever—as if he was daily occupied with the expectation of an event, anticipated by no one but himself. More than once, when she happened to see him going to pay her mother a visit, she could read in his eyes a thought, ‘Will it be

to-day ?' And on other occasions, when she met him coming away from her mother's room, he wore the look of a man whose anticipation had not been fulfilled.

What did he anticipate ?

CHAPTER XII.

OTHER events, however, occurred to break the gloom of the shadow of death settling down on the house.

The first time Rosamond saw the rector after her return home, she asked him,

‘ Shall I send Mrs. Chevalier my love ? ’

‘ What do you think ? ’ was his answer.
‘ Did she say anything to you about your visit to Wold ? ’

‘ That she wished it as soon as possible

forgotten,' admitted Rosamond, but hastened to add, 'One does not forget such kindness as one has never had shown one before.'

'Only, Miss Peyton, you know what she meant?'

'I know,' replied Rosamond, partly constrained to the acknowledgment by the rector's eyes searching her face. 'I am sorry; that is all. For I love her.'

She had thought that the rector might himself sometimes bring her a message from Wold. But he did not. Her brief visit was evidently to be buried in the complete oblivion which Mrs. Chevalier desired.

Only she still possessed, carefully treasured, that note that would give her access to Wold, if a moment of real need ever came.

Seeing that it was useless to think of

Wold, she fell back upon her previous practice of drawing each day's happiness out of her recollections of Marmaduke Torres's visits, and her speculations when she would see him again. The doctor declared the healing of the broken bone to be progressing most satisfactorily, though being deprived of the use of one arm was a source of perpetual small inconveniences and discomforts, but there could be no possibility for some time to come of her pursuing her enterprise of learning to manage Nelly. She had to content herself with paying the mare a daily visit in the stable, giving her lumps of sugar in her hand, and talking to her whenever she was brought round for Mr. Peyton to drive.

All unexpectedly Marmaduke Torres reappeared.

Rosamond was one afternoon strolling

in the woods near 'The Eagles' Nest,' when to her equal surprise and pleasure she perceived him approaching her.

As they shook hands, they stood nearly a quarter of a minute looking into each other's eyes.

Torres's yacht was at Plymouth. On coming up to Belmont he had found her brother at home, who had directed him to the part of the grounds in which he was likely to find Rosamond.

'You see what comes of taking your advice, and trying to learn to manage Nelly,' said Rosamond, pointing to her arm.

'Your brother told me. I hope you were not very much hurt. Only—you know—I did not advise you to try Nelly on the road to Wold.'

And he began immediately asking questions about Wold.

She stopped him.

‘Mr. Torres, I had better mention at once that I have made a solemn resolution not to tell anything about what I saw at Wold. Everyone is curious to hear: but I say nothing.’

‘Oh, but you know, that is too bad. Besides, you will grant that my case is different from that of the rest.’

‘It is different, I allow. Still I can tell you nothing. Cannot you understand? Mrs. Chevalier wishes to live apart from all the world: do you wonder that she should wish that? But, when I met with an accident near her house, her doors were immediately opened to me, with a hospitality readier than many people would have shown me who had no reason for instinctively shrinking from the idle curiosity of the world. You must think poorly indeed of me if you suppose that I would

repay her kindness by chattering of all that she has wished to veil. Does the rector talk of what he sees and hears at Wold? Or the doctor? Or Mrs. Chevalier's solicitor—if she has a solicitor. Would you respect the men if they did? Or is a girl some creature of whom no one expects honour or loyalty?’

‘I concede the force of what you say, but admit that I am excusably curious about the spot where my poor father breathed his last. Did you see the room in which the murder was committed?’

‘I am not going to tell you anything, Mr. Torres. You are clever enough, I know,’—she laughed—‘to take me off my guard, and to beguile me into some admission that I do not wish to make: only I hope that you are too much of a gentleman to do so. Some day Mrs. Chevalier will die. After that, I daresay anyone that

pleases may visit Wold : and you, if you choose, one of the first. While she lives, poor old lady, let her wishes be respected.'

'She will not be much loss, I take it, when she does die. My mother always says that she is a horrible woman.'

'It would be strange, would it not, if Mrs. Torres were not prejudiced? All I can tell you about Mrs. Chevalier is, that she was kinder to me than anyone else has ever been.'

'That is a sad statement, Miss Peyton,' remarked the man, regarding her.

'It is a true one. If you are my friend, you ought to feel some appreciation for anyone who was kind to me when I was in pain.'

He was silent; finding it, somehow, embarrassing to answer her. Though she could by no means be persuaded to gratify his curiosity about Wold, they had a plea-

sant ramble in the woods until nearly dinner-time. He had already accepted an invitation to remain to dinner and to spend the night at Belmont.

Perhaps Rosamond was that evening *en beauté*, as the French say, or, it might be, that the cause was some power which her beauty, like that of the girl of Major Torres's celebrated picture in the Academy, had of growing upon the people that knew her ; or her evening dress made her seem to Marmaduke Torres more closely to resemble his recollections of that picture ; or possibly all these causes combined together to produce the strong effect which her appearance that evening made upon him. Certain it is that she had never before appeared to him so handsome, whilst some of the things that she had said to him in the woods, and the spectacle of her arm still in its sling—a little by his fault—

filled him with a feeling of tenderness for her that is seldom other than fatal to any man's peace of mind.

He left the next morning, Rosamond strolling down to the lodge gates with him—the groom had driven on with dog-cart, and awaited him there. Some minutes they both of them spent talking to Nelly who was in the shafts, and then Rosamond, bidding him farewell, said,

‘Come again soon. Lennox and I both like to see you.’

He accepted the invitation, running up from Plymouth for the day, or sometimes passing a night at Belmont. Mr. Peyton always made him welcome, echoing the invitations of Lennox and Rosamond,

‘Come and see us again.’

Presently the yacht was laid up, and he went to stay with some friends for some shooting: but his visits did not cease.

Then, whilst he still continued to come, sometimes once in the week, sometimes twice, the weather altered. Sunny August had passed into a September that had been hitherto splendid, an exquisite continuation of summer arrived at a ripened maturity, with a temperature scarcely perceptibly declining, soft nights and cloudless days. But about the equinox the long-continued fine weather broke up. For a whole week it rained, with a cold wintry rain, that pattered against the window-panes, and plashed monotonously on the sodden ground. Whilst it still continued to rain, the wind rose until it blew a hurricane. Half the leaves were stripped from the trees before they were faded, and more than one veteran of the woods fell never to rise again. The brook grew swollen and turbid, and all the ponds overflowed, whilst the wind driving the pitiless rain moaned weirdly about the

house, and the garden became a kind of dismal swamp of broken sodden vegetation and universal desolateness. When the storm had passed and the sun rose again, it was to shine on a world, from which the last traces of summer had fled, full of the tokens of autumn's decay and winter's approaching desolateness.

A change had come also in doors as well as outside. The coming of winter always affected Mrs. Peyton's health unfavourably—which had been one of the reasons for hoping that a milder climate might afford her relief—and when the days turned suddenly cold, she took to her bed never to quit it again.

Eleanor, now always in request in the sick-room, spent many hours every day with her, and at other times was sad and tearful. And Mr. Peyton wore, each day, more and more of the air of a man filled

with an anticipation of something—that did not come off. Only Lennox's life presented no change. The long vacation was drawing to a close, and he was more deeply than ever absorbed in his busy studies. Rosamond had got rid of her sling, and talked of soon again taking Nelly in hand. She saw her mother scarcely once a week.

Marmaduke Torres's visits continued. He knew too, by this time, what was bringing him so often to Belmont, as well as Rosamond did. The girl whom he had rescued from destroying herself in a sudden foolish fit of dejection, whom he had declined to assist to fling herself away in another manner scarcely less fatal, had stepped into the position of the woman essential to the happiness of his existence. After all, there was no man living better entitled to possess her. He had mother-

wit enough to perceive that her temperament was of a difficult kind, one that might demand of the man who married her more forbearance and devotion than would be necessary to make other women happy. He had had ample warning, if any man ever had, that the character of the woman he loved had dark traits as well as attractive ones. But that made him only the more bent on winning her, for motives altogether unselfish. He believed that he understood her, and had love enough for her to surround her with attentions other men might neglect. Something in need of protection has potent attractions for the vigorous love of a man. His only hesitation was founded upon his deep-rooted conviction of the stupid want of variety of character in her sex. He had found so many objects of his admira-

tion turn out to be merely the exact counterpart of all their predecessors the moment some unlucky accident tore from their faces the mask of picturesque difference from other girls which they had managed to assume—perhaps exclusively for his benefit. The one question that he still continued to ask himself about her, even now that he felt sure of all the rest, was,

‘Is she really different from all these other women?’

As for Rosamond, the love that had stolen into her life was a heaven of sunshine. In her heart she had no consciousness that the year was dying early, that the winds were bleak, and the grey days chill. With her it was still high summer, and the faintest watery sunshine that broke the clouds gayer than the July sun, and the poor, starving, autumnal roses

sweeter than their richest sisters of June. Her lover was her all. When he came the sun shone, and the birds sang, and her heart danced in her bosom. When he was gone—she knew he would come back again. Her devotion to him and her admiration of him were absolute, though her pride would hardly permit her to confess the fact even to herself. He absorbed her and satisfied her. It seemed to her that all the love of which she had been defrauded during so many years of her life was now at last being lavished upon her in one deep draught of happiness, and all the neglect that she had known being overbalanced by the intoxicating admiration of the one man whose regard was more to her than that of all the world. She considered whether it was possible that she could be happier when she was engaged to him than she was now whilst

she could watch the attraction drawing him closer to her each time that he came to Belmont.

She made no effort to conceal the fact that the attraction was mutual; that she was mastering a delightful lesson in learning to return his love with all the passion of her deep and emotional nature.

He could hardly ask anything to which she would not accede. Only, about Wold she would tell him nothing. On that point she was inexorable; though quite unconscious of the power wielded by a girl who has discovered something which she can reasonably refuse her admirer.

Mrs. Dromere was so frequently at Belmont that it was impossible for Marmaduke Torres not to see her also on the occasion of some of his visits. She came ostensibly because Eleanor liked to see

her, and found her society consolatory and refreshing after her long hours of attendance in her aunt's sick-room. Marmaduke, on the other hand, much preferred her absence. A man seldom really forgives a woman for rejecting his addresses—unless she subsequently relents. If it happens that he lives to perceive that he made a fool of himself in courting her, and to be very glad that he was refused, he soon acquires an instinctive antipathy for her of a very distinct description. That was exactly Marmaduke Torres's case with Florence Dromere; and a provoking little way she had of regarding with a quiet amusement the attentions which he paid Rosamond, whilst assuming an air of being still able to manage him if she chose, did not improve his opinion of her.

He took particular umbrage at the

remarks which she made upon the subject:

‘Here again, Marmaduke! Still in pursuit of the “neglected” lady?’

‘Really, do you know, Marmaduke, your taste in young ladies compels me to feel anything but complimented by the attentions you were once upon a time kind enough to pay me.’

‘Marmaduke, you are not in earnest, I trust, in running after this wild, half-educated curiosity, Miss Peyton?’

Later she said, more plainly still,

‘Your mother will not like your marrying that Miss Peyton, Marmaduke. And you ought to consider your mother.’

‘You are quite mistaken,’ he replied to that, with a little temper. ‘My mother will be very pleased by my marrying Miss Peyton, if Miss Peyton will have me.’

‘That can only be, then, because Mrs.

Torres does not know her,' remarked Florence Dromere. 'Let your mother see her, and then hear what she will say.'

'Mother is very likely to see her. She writes to me something about inviting Miss Peyton to town for a little time in the autumn.'

'A widow's only son! He will be allowed to commit any folly he pleases,' said Florence to herself. 'Only it is a pity that some one cannot interfere. I wish I could get Bob down here. If he and Rosamond could only meet, that affair would be arranged in a fortnight; and she is just the wife for Bob.'

Of course all that she said against Rosamond only made the man more resolute to defend her and to win her. Florence Dromere ought to have known enough of the world to anticipate that consequence. But there are few women clever enough to

calculate the exact result of their saying about other women anything that they may feel prompted to say.

By that time Torres was hesitating to propose only because a man does hesitate a little, when his attachment to a girl has become paramount, simply from fear lest too great precipitancy should frustrate his suit. He had become too much enamoured of his liege-lady to have any doubts about her unlikeness to all the rest of womankind, or her unspeakable superiority to every other girl in the world.

Twice he came to Belmont resolved upon proposing—and departed again without having proposed, though once he came so near it that Rosamond's breast was all in a flutter.

Then he resolved to leave the choice of the propitious moment to chance, unwittingly selecting the course almost invari-

ably pursued by the men whose courtships end successfully, and continued his visits to Belmont, without bringing with him any of those definite motives which he found by experience made him uncomfortable all the time that he was in Rosamond's presence.

One afternoon after Lennox and he had been out driving with Rosamond, Rosamond on their return gathered some scraps of broken bread and biscuit, and strolled alone to the duck-pond to feed the birds, herself so happy that she was fain to scatter some crumbs of felicity around her, if only to the dumb creation. She had soon distributed her dole of scraps, which were eagerly gobbled up, and the water-fowl, perceiving that no more was to be had, sailed away again. But she remained near the pool. Leaning over the stone balustrade watching the movements

of the birds, and the low lights fading over the water, she was occupied with her own meditations; wondering in a kind of pleasant dream—she was too happy to anticipate evil—what would next ensue. Soon Lennox would be returning to Oxford. After that, Mr. Torres would no longer have the same excuse for his visits. Would he invent a new one for continuing them; or might she anticipate receiving from Mrs. Torres an invitation to spend a week or two in town? Some hints had been dropped of the possibility of her being asked to stay with Mrs. Torres in November. What a treat, to be in London with Marmaduke Torres, and without Eleanor! Lennox might even join her for a day or two—if he could be persuaded to tear himself from his books.

She was too completely immersed in her meditations and agreeable anticipations to

hear anyone approach, and it was not until a rustling of the underwood behind her made her turn with a start that she became aware that Marmaduke Torres had been for some minutes contemplating her, no doubt with admiration.

‘Do you know that it is very bad manners to take young ladies by surprise and make them start?’ she asked, with a little laugh.

‘Especially when they are occupied in thinking of their secrets,’ he replied, readily.

‘Everyone has secrets. Why should I not have mine?’ she asked, looking across the pool.

She had resumed her previous position, and he also was leaning over the balustrade at her side.

‘Then you really were thinking of your secrets?’ he answered.

‘I am not sure. Perhaps I was thinking of yours, you know,’ she answered, playfully.

He slipped his arm within hers.

‘Perhaps, Miss Peyton, your secrets are mine and mine yours.’

And as she turned to look at him, struck by the tone of his voice, and by his movement that was drawing her close against him, he continued,

‘My mother is going to ask you to come and see her: will you not come as my betrothed?’

Rosamond dropped her head. She could feel the man’s heart beating fast against her own.

‘Tell me you will, darling. I love you: you are my queen: my goddess: the very ground you tread on is sacred to me; and I cannot think of life without you: Rosamond—be my wife.’

Her breast was heaving in a flutter of happiness and confusion almost overpowering her; for the moment speech was impossible, but she yielded herself as he drew her closer and closer to him.

Then suddenly, with all the happiness she coveted already in her grasp, a sudden fear rushed upon her, and she put up her hand against his shoulder, so that he should not draw her entirely into his arms; and at last found courage to speak.

‘ Mr. Torres—one moment—please. Oh, do listen!—I know that you love me. Only, I want you to know. I am not all that you think me. Indeed I am not. Do believe me! I am not a good girl. You do not know what I am like when my temper gets the upper hand—or my jealousy. You have never seen me in one of my rages. And you know I am a girl without accomplishments. A badly-

educated girl. If you were some day to discover that you might have chosen more wisely? Mr. Torres—I do not want you to be punished all your life for loving me.'

'Then you do care for me a little?'

She lifted those magnificent eyes of hers to his, with a look almost plaintive.

'It is because I care that I hesitate,' she said.

'And you will send me away for that?'

His voice was troubled, for he began to fear that she was going, after all, to refuse him.

To send him away! Never to see him again! Rosamond felt a sudden terror pierce her heart chill as steel.

'No, no. I cannot!' she whispered, yielding to his caress. 'You must not leave me, too—like everyone else.'

‘Then this is “yes,” my queen,’ he said, pressing her to his breast.

Rosamond hung her head, and whispered a scarcely audible

‘Yes.’

They walked back together, through the wood enveloped by the sunset in a cloud of crimson and brown, like two walking in the witchery of a dream, arm in arm, hand in hand.

‘Don’t make me too happy, Marmaduke! Don’t make me too happy,’ that was what she said to him, laying her head on his shoulder in a caress soft and playful as a child’s. ‘I can never, never, never be to you what you are to me. You have had other people to love you. No one else has ever loved me: except my brother, and him I cannot understand. He is clever, and I am stupid. You have never been a pariah as I have been. You have

never been on the verge of desperation. You have never done things that have made you feel that the whole world was justified if it hated you. You cannot know what it is to be loved, after all.'

And she repeated low,

'To be loved, after all.'

'Only you must be patient and forgiving with me, dearest,' she said again, presently. 'I am afraid you will have so many things to forgive me. Lennox has forgiven me—oh, I could not tell you the things he has forgiven me. And if ever the day comes, Marmaduke, when you cannot forgive me—kill me kindly, and have done with me. Don't leave me to do the things I shall do when I find out that you can no longer love me.'

When they were near the house, he said,

'I suppose I may speak to Mr. Peyton?'

‘Please—at once. I am afraid,’ she smiled one of her old smiles, ‘you will find papa only too pleased to be rid of me.’

Mr. Peyton was undeniably pleased, whether because he was going to be relieved of his daughter or not, need not here be enquired. The match was a good match. Also Mr. Peyton, whilst asking what provision would be made for the young lady, showed himself both reasonable in his wishes, and liberal about his daughter’s dower.

‘I have always made it a rule, Mr. Torres, to treat the children with scrupulous justice,’ he remarked to his future son-in-law.

Torres liked him. With all his ill-concealed dislike to his children, and pronounced preference for his niece, there was something of the soul of honour about

him that could not fail to appeal to the heart of a gentleman.

Marmaduke Torres left the same evening after dinner to catch a late train. Rosamond came to the door to bid him good-bye, and he kissed her on the lips.

Half-an-hour later Eleanor came down from Mrs. Peyton's room, looking scared.

'Where is dear uncle?' she asked, scanning the drawing-room in which Rosamond was sitting alone by the fire, busy with her own thoughts.

'You are more likely to know than I.'

'Go and look for him at once, Rosamond. I want him to come upstairs. Auntie has had a sort of fit. I am going to send Lennox for the doctor.'

'He has gone to the station with Marmaduke. We must send one of the servants. Is mamma much worse, Eleanor?'

‘ It is the end, Rosamond ; it is the *end*,’
replied Eleanor, with the tears welling up
in her eyes. ‘ *Do* go and look for uncle.’

CHAPTER XIII.

It was not quite the end.

True, after this sudden syncope, which the medical men had feared, and had predicted as a certain sign of imminent danger, Mrs. Peyton sank more rapidly ; but, as so often happens in the case of protracted decay, her long infirmity had a lingering close, and more than a week elapsed, during which the whole household watched, in that painful suspense which includes no hope, her slow passing away.

Eleanor was seldom without tears in her eyes, and looked worn and weary. She was sharing alone with the nurse all the labours of the sick chamber. Rosamond noticed that the air of anticipation on Mr. Peyton's face became more and more distinct. He seemed to be saying to himself, 'It must come in a day or two now!' and to be fully relieved by the conviction that *it* was not far off.

For what was he waiting?

Every day Mrs. Peyton grew weaker, and still Mr. Peyton's face showed that what he anticipated had not yet taken place.

'I think,' said Eleanor one day, 'that dear uncle is expecting a change, even now. Sometimes I am sure I see in his face a look—as if he was sure that something was about to happen. I wish it

were not so ; because he is only deceiving himself, poor uncle !

‘ So she has seen it too,’ said Rosamond to herself.

For what was her father waiting ?

Had Mrs. Peyton herself noticed also that look of expectation in her husband’s face ?

It was so many years ago that she began to fear him : and during the long course of all these years she had learned yearly to fear him more and more, until she had come to shudder and shrink at the mere thought of him ; until the mere idea of anyone’s contradicting him, or even differing from him in opinion, had become alarming to her. To dread him more abjectly than she had dreaded him since her children had grown up was almost impossible, and yet, now, at the very end, she appeared to be possessed with some new

terror beyond any that she had felt before. She became immediately disquieted whensoever he entered the room, watching his movements with eyes too terrified to remain fixed upon him, and too terrified to be able to withdraw themselves from him. So long as he was in the room, she insisted upon Eleanor's remaining with her : or, if he offered to enter when Eleanor was not there, would frame some excuse for not seeing him until her niece could be found ; as if she dreaded most of everything being left a moment alone with him. Sometimes she would not see him at all.

‘ Dear uncle cannot understand it,’ said Eleanor. ‘ He has no idea how *prostrated* aunty is. Sometimes she can scarcely bear that even nurse or I should go near her. The least thing agitates her.’

Rosamond and her brother were absolutely forbidden the sick-room.

‘It is monstrous,’ protested Rosamond. ‘Mamma is dying, and we are not allowed to see her.’

‘It would be better for her if no one went near her,’ replied Lennox, ‘if that was possible. Only, you see, it is not. You know what Eleanor says: that the least movement in the room agitates her. Some of us *must* forego seeing her. She is our mother; and you and I must deny ourselves for her sake.’

He always had ready an explanation of anything in his father’s or his mother’s conduct that seemed to require one. Rosamond was aware of the fact, and besides admitted the truth of what he said, though she was not personally convinced by it.

‘Lennox,’ she said to herself, ‘has no suspicion how much mamma hates us both.’

One morning, Mr. Peyton, having obtained admission to his wife's room, sent both the nurse and Eleanor away, although the latter protested, in a whisper,

‘Oh, uncle dear, aunty will be frightened. She is *so* afraid, unless she has one or other of us *quite* near her, in case anything should happen.’

Mr. Peyton's only reply was to signify, by a silent motion of his hand, that she should obey his behests, as the nurse had done already.

Then he came to his wife's bedside.

‘Have you anything to say to me, Nelly?’ he asked.

The dying woman was positively shaking in her bed, cowering like some scared beast in dread of its life, and yet unable to avoid casting at his stern face those quick glances of her frightened eyes that were unable to rest a moment upon him.

‘Where is nurse? Where is nurse? I want nurse,’ was all that she would say.

‘I have sent nurse away, and Eleanor too. I want to know whether you have not something to say to me—something about the children.’

‘I cannot see the children. I am not strong enough. Where is nurse? I want nurse.’

That was all the answer he could elicit.

For a minute he seemed about to insist; and then had compassion upon the miserable woman, fain to move an inch or two further from him, or to hide herself from his sight under the bed-clothes.

He remembered that he had loved this woman—long ago.

‘I will send nurse to you,’ he said, relenting. ‘Only think—whether there is

not something that you wish to tell me—something about the children.’

He left her, and the nurse and Eleanor returned, to find her shivering and moaning, a picture of terror.

‘I knew aunty would be frightened,’ said Eleanor. ‘Only, uncle does not understand.’

All that afternoon Mrs. Peyton was saying to herself,

‘I ought to have thought of all that. I might have known that he would be suspicious. Only, what was I to do? Those children have killed me.’

‘Never, never leave me alone with your uncle, Eleanor,’ she said, towards the end of the afternoon. ‘I cannot be left alone. Either you or nurse must be with me.’

‘Only, dear uncle would wish to speak to you alone *sometimes*, aunty, you know, would he not?’ replied Eleanor, in her

gentle way. 'Never mind, dear, I won't forget.'

Mrs. Peyton made no reply. She had at last ceased her incessant chatter, though she seemed still often to be murmuring things to herself.

The day before she died, she asked the medical man,

'Shall I live through to-morrow, doctor?'

The disciple of Æsculapius replied with something encouraging; but her ears detected the unreality of his assurances. Her despair about herself had never for a moment quitted her.

In the morning of the following day she seemed a little stronger, and lay still for a long time, propped upon her pillows, not sunken, as she generally was, helplessly in her bed. Once when Eleanor spoke to her, she said,

‘ I am thinking.’

She seemed to be arriving at some determination.

About noon, she signalled Eleanor to come to her.

‘ I want to speak to your uncle—alone,’ she said.

‘ Really alone, aunty?’

The sick woman bent her head in assent. She was already weaker than she had been some hours before.

‘ I will fetch him, aunty dear : if you are *sure* you wish it.’

Mrs. Peyton did wish it. A new fear had fallen upon her. The fear of an account to be given upon ‘ the other shore ’ towards which she was so fast drifting.

Mr. Peyton came at once.

There was a look in his face this time that said, ‘ At last !’

The nurse and Eleanor left him alone with his wife.

Her eyes were already scanning his stern face with the same terrified look, and, if he could have discerned her thoughts, he would have heard her saying in herself,

‘I can never tell him! I can never tell him. It is impossible.’

He was regarding her, already beginning to see in her face the alarm that was rapidly mastering her.

How terrified she looked, and how wasted she was! What a wreck, poor woman! and how ill she had behaved to him!

‘You sent for me,’ he said.

‘Yes, yes,’ she replied, nervously, seeking what she should say to explain away what she had done. ‘I shall not live till midnight, Gerard.’

He waited in silence.

‘I shall not live till midnight,’ she re-

peated. 'I am so weak. I wanted to tell you that I shall not live till midnight.'

'But—if that is so—you need not have sent the nurse and Eleanor away to tell me that.'

Mrs. Peyton made no reply.

'Had you nothing else to tell me, Nelly?'

'Nothing else. Only, that I shall not live till midnight.'

She looked around her : and Mr. Peyton recognised the look, one with which he had long been familiar. He knew no way of describing it to himself but as a look of coward resolution. And there is no resolution in the world equal to the resolution of cowardice.

'Are Eleanor and nurse gone?' she asked. 'Where are they?—I want them.—They should not leave me.'

Her voice was feeble in the extreme, indistinct and wandering.

For a minute Mr. Peyton stood watching her, whilst she repeated faintly,

‘Nurse and Eleanor,—I want them.’

Had she forgotten that she had sent for him to speak to her alone? Had she forgotten that she had meant to tell him something? Was her mind in that weak, wandering stage when the intentions of a moment since are lost, before they can be put into execution? It was possible.

It was also possible that she was evading him. That look of cowed resolution was still present in her face, whilst she repeated,

‘Eleanor—and nurse.’

He came nearer to her.

‘You had something to tell me,’ he said.
‘Something, was it not, about the children? Tell me.’

He saw a shade of fear cross her face, and she turned away her eyes quickly.

‘I want Eleanor.’

‘She shall come back when you have told me. Tell me the truth about Lennox and Rosamond.’

‘I cannot see them—I am not strong enough.—I want—Eleanor.’

He could get no other answer from her, and at last left in despair.

Perhaps she would yet send for him again : when the end was nearer.

But as soon as he was gone she lay still, saying to herself,

‘I could not tell him ! I could not !’

In the course of the afternoon she dozed, lying motionless and almost pulseless in an unnatural sleep : a sleep in which Eleanor and the nurse more than once believed that she had passed away.

Towards six she awoke, and had some-

thing to say to Eleanor. Her voice had become so weak, as to be scarcely audible.

‘I could not tell him, Eleanor. I could not tell him.—Tell him that—I could not tell him.’

‘Yes, darling. It will be all right. I’ll tell him,’ said Eleanor, comfortingly.

She had no notion of what her aunt meant; and indeed supposed her hardly conscious of what she was saying.

‘Did she say anything, miss?’ asked the nurse.

‘Something about that she could not tell something.’

‘She’s wandering, miss. Look, she has dropped off again.’

Had the dying woman had any intention of communicating her terrible secret to Eleanor? Perhaps she had. Perhaps she would have told it, if Eleanor had known that there was a secret to be told; or had

had the skill to help her to speak it. And perhaps, at the last moment, she would have found her courage unequal to committing even to Eleanor's ears what she had so long kept locked in her own breast. And perhaps, as the nurse said, she was only wandering, and her words but an unconscious echo of her last conscious thoughts.

Later in the evening she woke once more, only opening her eyes for a few minutes, and then became unconscious; and so died, taking her secret with her.

Mr. Peyton was not present. When he was summoned to her room, she was dead.

Eleanor made no remark about the last words she had spoken. She attached no importance to them.

Mr. Peyton himself announced to Lennox and Rosamond their mother's death,

and afterwards they were permitted to see her,—it was nearly a fortnight since either of them had been allowed to approach her.

Of the two Lennox was the more affected, which was perhaps natural. One of the few remarks that Rosamond made was,

‘I do not know what I feel, Lennox. Perhaps mamma was only one degree less disregarded than we have been. One thing is certain, now she is gone, you and I cannot be more alone in the world than we were before.’

Whether that would be so or not remained to be seen.

All the evening Mr. Peyton sat alone in his arm-chair by the fireside in his own little sanctum. He lighted a cigar, but was so much occupied with his thoughts that it went out many times.

Of what was he thinking so intently, sitting all alone in the silent house full of the stillness of death?

Of the dead woman upstairs? It was impossible not to think of her; but he was putting her away from his thoughts as fast as he could.

When she did come into his memory it was in the shape of recollections of the year when Lennox and Rosamond were born.

But he thought a great deal more of the name he bore, of the old Leicestershire family, and of the estates that had descended from generation to generation, until they reached him—the last.

No, not the last, he trusted. Only he was not so young as he used to be. He must marry again soon.

And he asked himself,

‘That bookish lad, how will he take the things I shall have to say to him? I have tried to be just to him and his sister. Will he see it, and try to be just to me?’

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.



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